

LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1499.—VOL. LVIII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 23, 1892.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["THAT'S A RUDLAND FACE," SAID RONALD, AS HESTER AND THE LITTLE GIRL DISAPPEARED.]

A LATE ATONEMENT.

PROLOGUE.

FAR enough from old England, thousands of miles from their native land, a regiment of British troops were quartered. The 92nd were as brave a body of men as ever marched to the sound of a military band; they were very popular in their distant station, and there was a feeling of regret in many a heart when it became known that they were to be withdrawn, and that orders had come for their immediate return to England.

The 92nd themselves hardly shared this regret, they had met with much kindness and hospitality in the little crown colony, but on the other hand the climate was atrocious, mosquitoes, dust storms and fever were trials from which they would gladly be released, as one of the private soldiers frankly remarked to his fellows, it would be a comfort to see a respectable cold Christmas again instead of feeling as though one's almanack had suddenly

turned topsy-turvy and thrown December into the middle of July.

The chaplain of the 92nd was young and unmarried. How he came to embrace a clerical career people often wondered, for though one of the kindest-hearted and most conscientious men who ever breathed, Ronald Fenton, never seemed quite at home in the pulpit, his sermons were undeniably inferior to his conversation, and it is only fair to say he was fully conscious of the fact. A good man with a sincere reverence for his calling, and an honest desire to do his duty, Mr. Fenton yet seemed marvellously out of place in his present lot.

No one could have quite explained why, unless it was his extremely youthful air and simplicity of manner which strangers sometimes mistook for simpleness—a great error, for Ronald had his full share of brains, and possessed besides a clear intellect and sound judgment.

"Mr. Fenton would be delightful," said one of his fair friends to another, "if only he could contrive to look ten years older, and not to be so trampled upon."

She was quite right; only by "trampling" she did not mean that any one persecuted or scorned the young chaplain, but that from the mere fact of his good nature and willingness to oblige, Ronald Fenton was put upon.

A dozen things that were really not his work became so because he never refused to relieve other people of the trouble.

He was at every one's beck and call, in sorrow or joy his sympathy was demanded, and received as a right; in every scheme, either philanthropic or social, he was expected to do the hard work, while others received the honour and credit; in short, Ronald Fenton was about the hardest worked member of the 92nd Regiment, and yet, neither his exertions or the intense heat and tropical climate had the least effect upon his appearance.

He had come out to Rudland looking about twenty-four, with very fair hair, a pink and white complexion like a girl's, and the mildest, kindest of blue eyes, and though it was seven years ago, and everyone knew he must be well over thirty, he did not look a day older than when he landed. The fair hair, girlish complexion and blue eyes were quite unchanged,

and strangers always imagined him to be a newly-appointed chaplain just out from England.

It was the height of summer, which, since Radlan is on the other side of the equator, meant the middle of February. In another month the 92nd Regiment would be under way for home, the mosquitoes, dust storms, and tropical heat would be things of the past.

They would probably be stationed somewhere in England, and be free to look up the friends and relations they had not seen for seven years, to gather up the dropped threads of pleasant acquaintanceships, and talk with loved familiar kindred of the changes those seven years of absence had made.

Unfortunately, for the little chaplain—he was decidedly short, having been the smallest man of his college—he had no relations to speak of—an only child—his parents had died before his school days were over; his guardian uncle being an officer, with some influence had insisted on his taking orders and becoming in due course an army chaplain.

The Colonel died while Mr. Fenton was on his way to Radlan, and now Ronald had no kindred nearer than a few cousins. He had no very intimate friends, no one at all whose house would have seemed home to him.

The loneliness of his life is best understood by saying that the English mail had rarely brought him a letter, and there was no one in his native land to whom he wrote regularly.

It was nine o'clock. Mr. Fenton had prepared his sermon for the next day, and was reading a magazine. Radlan boasted an excellent public library, which supplied most of the leading English papers and journals a month or so after date; his dog curled up at his feet, a tumbler of lime juice and water by his side, and the delightful consciousness he need not undergo the pangs of composing any more sermons for a week, Ronald was thoroughly enjoying himself. The French windows were open on to the verandah, whose trellis work was hidden by the gorgeous blossoms of the scarlet passion-flower. Far away he could just discern the blue waves of the Indian Ocean, and the white sails of the ships in the bay. The pale moon was rising slowly over them, a great stillness had settled on Radlan, and rest had come even to the indefatigable Mr. Fenton!

Had it? At the very moment when Ronald was thoroughly interested in his story, his soldier servant appeared with a very solemn face, and a small note directed in a quavering, uncertain hand.

"From Mr. Grieves, please sir!"

Ronald started, not because of the lateness of the hour, or because the note might be a summons for him to quit his hard-earned repose, and go forth once more to his labours, but from a very different reason. He had never in his life spoken to Mr. Grieves who was indeed popularly regarded by Radlan as a misanthrope.

Never since Mr. Fenton had been in the colony could he remember having heard a good word of the merchant who was the richest man in the town, and yet had never expended a shilling in charity or hospitality. With the note still unsopened in his hand, the chaplain tried to recollect the fragmentary history he had picked up of the wealthy trader.

It was little enough. Joseph Grieves had come from England nearly thirty years before and engaged himself as bookkeeper to one of the leading merchants. By skill and energy he had raised himself to a partnership with his employer, married the old man's daughter and inherited the whole of his possessions.

Mrs. Grieves died young, leaving no living children, and from that moment, her husband changed into a gloomily disagreeable man. He refused all invitations, admitted no one to his house, and seemed to care for nothing in the world but making money. No one could say a dishonest act to his charge, he had robbed no one in word or deed, he kept his business engagements punctually, paid a fair price to every-

one he employed. He was honest, industrious and upright, but everyone in Radlan regarded him with aversion, and his beautiful house had not been entered by friend or acquaintance for years.

"What a simpleton I am," reflected Mr. Fenton, "to go puzzling over what the old man can want with me, when I have only to open the letter to find out."

The letter was very short and very simple but it did not at all solve the clergyman's enigma.

"They tell me you are a good man and merciful—come to me at once. I am in sore need of a friend."

There was no signature. The writing all gave signs of weakness, and the last words had evidently been penned with great difficulty.

Ronald Fenton never hesitated. He took up his hat, and calling to his servant that he might be late, he went out into the still beauty of the summer night.

He knew where Mr. Grieves lived; it was one of the oldest houses in Radlan, and had once been noted for its sumptuous hospitality. Recluse as he was, the merchant had never grudged the money spent on his home. It was as well cared for, as tastefully kept up as in the old days when his young wife had made its sunshine. Walking up the avenue of blue gum trees which led to the house, Ronald thought he had never seen a more picturesque dwelling.

It was built according to the fashion of the country, entirely on one floor, all the four sides were surrounded by a verandah, on to which the windows opened.

The front door stood ajar, and pushing it back Ronald entered a large square hall, whose polished floor was half hidden by gay eastern rugs, stands of rushwork filled with maiden-hair and other ferns, gave a deliciously cool and refreshing aspect to the place.

Before Mr. Fenton could ring or attempt in any way to make his presence known a woman came out of one of the rooms opening from the hall and confronted him.

Ronald never forgot that meeting, he was not an imaginative, still less a suspicious man, the wholesome life of hard work and practical round of daily duties which occupied him, prevented his having time to be fanciful, and his placid, even temper and calm judgment saved him from distrusting his fellow creatures; but as he looked at Mr. Grieves' housekeeper one glance convinced him of two things, she was not a good woman, and she resented his coming to Magnolia Lodge.

She was a woman of forty odd years, with a colourless face, and hands of blue black hair arranged with unnatural smoothness on either side of her plump face, tall and commanding in figure, she was dressed in a soft grey nun's veiling, which fitted her to a nicety, a small gold brooch fastened her collar, there were rings on her firm, white fingers; but though her attire and bearing were those of a lady, though when she spoke her grammar was irreproachable, Ronald felt quite certain that she was not really a gentlewoman.

He heard afterwards that Hester Dixon had been maid to the poor young wife, and Joseph Grieves had retained her afterwards as housekeeper, all the other servants employed—and there were nearly a dozen, counting the outdoor men—were coloured, over these Hester Dixon ruled with despotic sway.

"Mr. Grieves can see no one," she said, civilly, to Ronald Fenton, "he never receives strangers; besides, he is very ill!"

Before the chaplain could retort that he had been sent for some one else came out of the room she had just quitted, a grave faced, elderly man; it was Dr. Browne, the leading physician in Radlan. He shook the young clergyman's hand, for they were well acquainted, and said, earnestly,—

"Thank Heaven you are come, Mr. Grieves has been asking for you repeatedly; this way please."

The housekeeper was following them in

noiseless fashion, but Dr. Browne turned round to her and said, politely,—

"My patient is asking for some coffee, will you prepare it yourself please, Mrs. Dixon, he does not seem to fancy it got ready by any one else."

She darted a look at the doctor which would have scared a nervous man, perhaps she suspected it was but a ruse to get her out of the way. However, she did not attempt to dispute his mandate, and retired to the kitchen regions, while the two gentlemen went on to the sick room.

Ronald Fenton had seen the merchant several times, he had indeed been pointed out to him as the "richest man in Radlan." It crossed the chaplain's mind, as he saw his haggard, troubled face, that gold and silver are but feeble comfort when their owner stands at the gates of the valley of the shadow of death.

"I thought you would come!"

"I started as soon as I got your note," said Ronald, simply. "What can I do for you?" Apparently Dr. Browne had learned that the sick man wished to see the new comer alone, for he calmly looked the bedroom door, and then stepping out on to the verandah he closed the window, and took up his station in a low Madeira chair, not only to be out of ear shot, but also to protect that means of entrance from Mrs. Dixon, should she be seized with curiosity.

"I am dying," began Mr. Grieves, quietly, more as though he had been speaking to a third person than himself. "I don't need you to tell me that. I can't go until I have righted a great wrong. I have no one I can trust, will you help me?"

"I will do my best," replied Ronald simply, "but I ought to warn you that in a month's time I shall be on my way to England, would not some one actually living in Radlan serve you better?"

"No! I like your face and I can trust you—for your mother's sake!"

"Did you know her?" asked Ronald, who cherished very tenderly the memory of the fair, gentle creature who had died literally of a broken heart at her husband's death.

"I knew her intimately, it was once my dearest hope that she would be my wife—it was because I could not bear to see your father's happiness that I changed my name, forsook home and country, and came out here."

Ronald pressed the trembling hand with almost a woman's gentleness.

"Only tell me what I can do for you?"

"You can help me to right a great wrong—do you know why my wife died and my little girl, why I have led a lonely, unloved life because there was a curse on me!"

Ronald thought his mind was wandering, perhaps the suspicion was written on his face, for the dying man hurried on with his story, eagerly, impressively, almost as though he feared strength would fail him ere he had finished.

It was a very simple story, and perhaps a conscience less sensitive than Ronald Fenton's would not have understood the burden of remorse which had haunted Joseph Grieves for well-nigh thirty years.

On the voyage out from England he had become acquainted with a young man of good family who was going to the gold-fields of Australia, to try to make his fortune, he had left a wife and little children behind him in England, he was full of hope and sanguine of success. He had tried to induce his new friend to accompany him to Sydney, but failed.

Mr. Grieves landed at Cape Town, and a few months later went on to Radlan. Seven years passed Joseph Grieves was Mr. Molton's bookkeeper, and already saw fair prospects before him when it chanced that he was sent by his employer on business to Cape Town, which in those days was perhaps a week's journey by sea from Radlan. There he met his old acquaintance who was on his way

home to England with a large fortune. He had proved to be the one out of a hundred who succeeded at the gold diggings, he had prospered beyond his wildest expectations, and was taking his gold home with him in an iron bound safe or chest.

He had stopped at the Cape, where it was then the custom for vessels from Australia to touch, because he was attacked by illness, and it was thought a week on shore would set him up. He was delighted to meet with his old fellow traveller and insisted on Mr. Grievess putting up at his hotel as his guest, and of unlocking the precious chest and exhibiting its marvellous contents.

Grievess remonstrated with him, prudently pointing out he had far better dispose of the gold in Cape Town, and take his spoils home in some portable shape. It was in vain, Will Trevlyn had set his heart on showing the valuable fruits of his labour to his wife. He perished his iron-bound chest was safe as a banker's strong room.

At that very time Mr. Molton wrote to Joseph Grievess mentioning that he thought of taking a partner. He would have preferred his young friend to any other but it was indispensable that some capital should be invested, did Grievess think his friends would advance a moderate amount.

It was an awful temptation. Will Trevlyn was richer than many a millionaire, such a little, such a very little of his spoil would suffice. Grievess put his pride in his pocket and asked a loan. It was refused, refused too in such bitterly heartless terms, that Joseph Grievess grew desperate and meditated revenge.

Mr. Trevlyn sailed for England with his precious iron-bound chest. He died on the voyage, and his effects, including the chest, were forwarded to his widow.

When she came to open the latter it contained nothing but stones. There was a family consultation among the Trevlyns, the poor young widow asserted positively her husband had made his fortune, and was bringing it home with him, but Will had always been given to romantic tales, and as his brothers sensibly observed, what man in his right mind would ever have attempted to convey such a fortune as he talked of in specie, then it was urged that he had suffered from brain fever in Australia, and what more likely than that his senses were affected when he wrote his glowing accounts home. If they attempted to prove that the chest had been robbed on the voyage, they might be indicted themselves for a conspiracy when it transpired they had no proofs of their statement but the rambling letter of a man in brain fever.

"You can guess the rest," said Grievess, faintly. "I sinned, and sinned willingly, but I was terribly punished, the money brought a curse with it. I lost my wife and her child. I have never dared to make a single friend lest some day disgrace should fall on them for my sake."

"I understand," said the chaplain, quietly, "you changed the boxes."

"Ay! I had one made the facsimile of Trevlyn's and filled it with stones. I don't know how I changed them, it was done as his luggage went on board in the confusion. I should never have thought of it but for his talents."

"And you used the money?"

"I used two thousand pounds. I have put back that sum with interest and compound interest on the whole fortune, and it is ready for restoration; that is where I want your help. For five-and-twenty years I have been prepared to give it up, only I dreaded the inquiry, and the prison I felt would open for me."

"And you want me to restore the property to the Trevlyns?"

"Ay; there is the gold," he pointed to an enormous iron-bound chest, which stood at the foot of his bed. I have left you my heir—for your mother's sake—and I know if you give me your word you will see to this."

"But what else have I?" asked Ronald.

"There must be hundreds of Trevlyns in England. What is to secure me from giving your atonement to the wrong family?"

"Ay, call it that," said the dying man, slowly, "my atonement! I know you will shield my memory, and not let people speak more harshly of me than they need."

Ronald tried to lead him back to the point.

"There are many Trevlyns in England, sir. Can't you give me any idea what part your comrade came from?"

"I think it was Cornwall. But you can't mistake, his name was Will, and his wife's Nancy. There can't be more than one Nancy Trevlyn whose husband died on his voyage home from Sydney in 1860."

"I will do my best!"

"You promise?" urged the dying man.

"You will make it the object of your life to find out Will Trevlyn's children and restore them their inheritance?"

And with Ronald's promise in his ears the dying man passed to the silent land which is very far off. If a quarter of a century's repentance can avail to efface sin, well, surely his was blotted out.

Dr. Browne and Mr. Fenton left Magnolia Lodge in company. The elder man's face was full of deep feeling, for he belonged to that type of medical men to whom patients can never become mere cases.

"I wish you would come in with me, I want to talk to you," he said, abruptly, as they passed his pretty bungalow.

Ronald assented, and they were soon seated in the doctor's own den—a room rather overstocked with medical books and surgical instruments, but withal cosy and homelike.

"I am afraid, Mr. Fenton, you have undertaken a very difficult task," said the doctor, kindly. "I thought it might perhaps help you if I told you I knew everything."

"I wonder Mr. Grievess did not ask you to undertake the responsibility," said Ronald, gravely. "You would have been far better fitted for it."

"My good fellow, how could I leave my home and go searching from one end of England to another? When Mr. Grievess sent for me this morning, and asked me if he was dying, I could not deceive him. He sent for his lawyer, and made his will. Then he told me just the outlines of the story he told you in case you should not arrive in time. We had begun to despair of you."

"I started the moment I received the letter. It only reached me about nine!"

"Then that woman stopped it. I don't like speaking ill of an old acquaintance and I have known Hester Dixon all her life, but she is a bad specimen of our people."

"Why should she want to prevent her master from seeing me?"

"I fancy that for years she has suspected Mr. Grievess of having a secret, and that in his last illness she hoped to discover it and use it for her own advantage."

"Do you think the—?" Ronald hesitated, "the chest is safe?"

"Perfectly. Hester Dixon is a superstitious woman. She would not scruple to injure the living, but she would be afraid to enter the presence of the dead for any sinful purpose."

"It was a strange story!"

"Ay! I suspected for years the poor fellow had something on his mind ever since when his wife died, he said 'his curse had fallen on her.' I suppose the law would count him a great sinner, but there is no question of his penitence. I should say he had never had a happy hour since the crime."

"There is something touching in his putting back the portion of the money he used, and adding the interest year by year," said Ronald, pityingly; "but I wonder he did not try to find the owners, it would have been a satisfaction to him."

"I fancy that is why he did not make the attempt," replied the doctor. "There was something almost morbid in his repentance. He denied himself the satisfaction of making the atonement."

"I wish he had not fixed on me!"

"I think you are just fitted for the task. You are young, you have no home ties." Here the little chaplain blushed, "and so you are free to spend your time in seeking out the Trevlyns."

"But," Mr. Fenton was so little used to speaking of himself that he felt it almost selfish to advance this objection. "I am afraid it will be a great expense, and I have nothing in the world but my pay. I don't grudge the time, for I am to have a few months leave of absence when the regiment goes back to England; but I fear just the mere travelling will cost a great deal."

Dr. Browne looked at the little man in amazement.

"I always heard you were generous," he said, quietly; "but surely you never dreamed that the expenses of the search would fall on you?"

"I could not touch the Trevlyn money," said the chaplain, firmly. "It would seem dishonest. I shall never open that chest, doctor, until I hand it over to its rightful owner!"

Dr. Browne smiled.

"My good fellow, didn't poor Grievess tell you he has left you a handsome legacy. You will be a rich man, how rich I hardly know until I hear the will read?"

Mr. Fenton opened his eyes.

"I don't want his money, poor fellow! I'd rather have nothing to do with it!"

"Don't go against his wishes," pleaded the doctor. "Remember except the contents of that chest all his fortune was his own, honestly come by. He has not a relation this side of the equator. If he has kindred in England they have no claim on him after nearly thirty years estrangement. If ever there was a man free to do as he liked with his own it was poor Grievess!"

The funeral was the second day after the death, and Ronald Fenton, at his own request, read the burial service. There were very few mourners. The lonely life the deceased had led for so many years had estranged his friends.

Mrs. Dixon, who had prepared a sumptuous luncheon, was surprised at the few who appeared to partake of it. Dr. Browne greeted her civilly; but it was plain that his distrust of her was not forgotten, for when the coffin had been carried out of the pleasant bedroom he quietly locked both door and windows with his own hand, and put the key in his pocket.

"The house will be very deserted during the funeral," he observed, civilly, to Mrs. Dixon, "and there being several valuables in this room as Mr. Grievess executor, I think it is best to be careful."

"Quite so," said the housekeeper. "But I was intending to remain at home myself, so everything would have been cared for."

"It would be a pity for you to miss the chance of paying your last respects to your old friend," was the doctor's reply.

He said no more to her. He was an old resident of Rodlan, and he could remember the time when pretty penniless Hester Dixon had been the humble companion of Mr. Molton's heiress. In those days it had been whispered she would gladly have married the handsome book-keeper. She had another suitor, whom she accepted, a cousin of her own, and after six months of rather troubled matrimony being left a penniless widow, she was thankful to return to the Moltons.

By that time Edith was engaged to Joseph Grievess, and Hester accompanied her to Magnolia Lodge partly as companion, partly as her detractors called it, as maid.

Dr. Browne guessed she hoped she had cherished all through the years that had passed since Edith's death, but whether those hopes sprang from real, honest love for Joseph Grievess or only a desire to share his wealth the doctor could not tell; any way, the hopes were faded now, faded for ever.

Only a few of the funeral party returned to Magnolia Lodge to listen to the reading of the

will—perhaps a dozen all told assembled in the library—there was considerable speculation as to its contents, for Mr. Grieves had led such a lonely, friendless life for so many years that no one in Radlan had been able to form any idea of his intentions.

Mr. Carew, the lawyer, who had been summoned so hurriedly the very day of the testator's death, broke the seals and read the document aloud, first remarking that though needful haste had forced the will to be as short and simple as possible, they would find all legal formalities had been attended to, and it would hold its own in any court of law.

First and foremost came the legacies. Every servant at Magnolia Lodge, every employé in the great store in Marine street received a year's wages free of duty, to the manager of the store was left the stock and goodwill, to Dr. Browne Magnolia Lodge with its furniture, then the testator's savings with his investments which, oddly enough, were all placed in English securities, were bequeathed to the Rev. Ronald Fenton, Chaplain of the 92nd Regiment, in remembrance of the old friendship between Mr. Grieves and his mother; the iron-bound chest and any books he might fancy were also bequeathed to the young clergyman, who was besides appointed residuary legatee, Mr. Carew and Dr. Browne were executors, each receiving a thousand pounds.

Save for one point—hereafter to be mentioned—it was an eminently just will. The manager, who had done so much for Joseph Grieves business, reaped a rich reward, his servants were all remembered, the executors were amply recompensed for their trouble; and then having remembered all just claims Mr. Grieves pleased himself by bequeathing all his savings to the son of an old friend; perfectly fair and just as everyone admitted, but why, and this question occurred to most, was Hester Dixon's name not mentioned?

The rival lawyer, Mr. Green, ventured to express his surprise at this omission to the housekeeper.

"I made sure Mr. Grieves would have recollected the tie between yourself and his late wife. I cannot understand his failing to provide for you."

The housekeeper's impassive face remained unchanged, her voice was quite calm as she replied.

"Mr. Grieves paid me a liberal salary, and I have saved money; doubtless he thought more would only be a snare to a lonely widow. I hear this house is now your property, Dr. Browne, I trust you will not grudge me a shelter for two or three days while I can decide my plans?"

"Remain as long as you like," said the doctor, kindly. "I do not think we need detain the company any longer; but I shall be glad if you, Mr. Fenton, will remain. My co-executor and myself have two or three things to discuss with you."

Mrs. Dixon left the room with the visitors. Ronald and the two executors were left alone.

"Mr. Carew," began the doctor. "I think it best to tell you that the chest mentioned in the will contains property of great value, what would be your advice to Mr. Fenton? He is returning to England in about a month, so that it seems useless to remove it to his temporary home; but as owner of Magnolia Lodge, I don't like the responsibility of its being left here?"

"The bank is the best guardian for valuables," said the lawyer, promptly. "I think Mr. Fenton had better ask the manager to undertake the trust. I don't wish to seem inquisitive, but I have always wondered what that chest held. I am old enough to remember poor Grieves bringing it from Cape Town. I was rude enough then to ask him point blank what it contained, and taking offence boylike at his refusal to enlighten me. I suggested it was his own coffin. To my knowledge no one saw or heard of the chest from that time till he moved to Magnolia

Lodge, when it was screwed to the floor to make it impossible for it to be stolen."

"Well, I had better go round to the bank and see the manager," said Ronald, soberly, "fortunately, I know him a little already."

Mr. Clements was amazed at the young chaplain's request, in common with most of the people at Radlan he knew Mr. Fenton for an indefatigable worker, a bad preacher, and the kindest hearted man who ever put on broad cloth; but the idea of the young fellow's coming into a legacy seemed impossible, Ronald was so completely at everyone's beck and call, so put upon and made use of by all his friends, so meek and generally submissive that the very idea of his coming into a fortune seemed incredible.

"I'll take care of the chest for you, with pleasure, Mr. Fenton; but I hope you are not deceived. I knew Joseph Grieves well, and I don't think he would leave anything of value to a stranger. Why don't you open the chest and judge for yourself?"

But Ronald stood firm.

"I shall not open it until I return to England. Sir, those were Mr. Grieves' wishes, and he has been too generous to me for me to think of going against his desire, besides the chest, he has left me all his savings and Mr. Carew says they are worth at least a hundred thousand pounds."

Mr. Clements opened his eyes.

"Left them all to you!"

"He knew my family before he left England," said Ronald, not caring to explain further.

"And as he has no relations of his own, I suppose his mind turned to his old friends."

The news spread like wild fire throughout Radlan, the small fair-haired chaplain with nothing in the world but his pay, had suddenly inherited a fortune. Everyone had always liked Ronald, but during the last days of his stay in the little crown colony his popularity increased wonderfully, and he took it all with the simplest indifference, he had always loved to help people and he helped them still, but as to being an honoured guest at the Governor's dinner-table, or playing lawn-tennis for hours with the vice-regal daughters, why it was not in his line, and he respectfully declined.

He really had a great deal of work to get through, though Dr. Browne assisted him to the utmost of his power. Between them they planned and ordered a strong iron case large enough to hold the chest. This was not pad locked, but hermetically soldered all round, it was painted vermilion and on the outside appeared in white letters—

The Rev. Ronald Fenton,
Messrs. Davidson and Co.,
Bankers,
London.

The peculiar colour was chosen so as to make it almost impossible that anyone else should have similar luggage, and that the property might be easily identified in case of loss.

"Though why you should fear loss I can't imagine," said the doctor, cheerfully. "There's a vast deal of property goes over to England year by year, some of it with its owners and some without, and I never yet heard of any being either lost or stolen. Still, considering its only yours in trust, I can understand your being a little over anxious. Just take my advice. You say Davidson and Co. were your uncle's bankers, and know you personally. Drive straight to them when you get to London, and leave the precious chest in their care."

Ronald nodded.

"Happily I shall have some months of leave, so that I can search for the Trevlynas comfortably."

The doctor opened his eyes.

"Surely, with your fortune you won't remain an army chaplain. Why, Carew is continually discovering fresh investments, and when you go to Mr. Grieves' English solicitor

no doubt you will hear of more. At the very least your income will be five or six thousand a year. Why should you not resign your appointment?"

But Ronald's blue eyes were full of a strange earnestness.

"It is my Master's work," he answered, simply, "and I ought not to give it up because I happen to be a rich man."

"You are perfectly incorrigible. Why don't you marry and settle down in a country vicarage?"

But the chaplain shook his head.

"I have never thought of marrying. You see, I have never dreamed of being able to afford it; and I like my work, Dr. Browne—except the sermons."

"Well," there was a suspicious moisture about the doctor's eyes. "I hope you will change your mind. You've the makings of a good husband, Mr. Fenton, and an old bachelor's lot is but a dreary one at best."

There was some delay in the settlement of Mr. Grieves' affairs; but all was got over in time for Ronald Fenton to sail with the rest of the 92nd Regiment.

The Colonel's wife, the very lady who had said Mr. Fenton would be charming if he could contrive to look ten years older, and not let himself be trampled on, was a very clever and fascinating woman. She had some unmarried sisters, and one of them was returning under her care to England.

It came into Mrs. Cooper's head it would be a splendid thing for Lucie and the family generally if Ronald and the young lady would make a match of it.

She was determined to throw them together as much as possible, and see if four weeks of each other's society would not suffice to achieve her end.

Unfortunately Mr. Fenton was not a lady's man. He was far happier playing with the Coopers' pretty children than in talking to their aunt, and when she stood at his side on deck watching the coast of Radlan rapidly disappearing from view Lucie Taylor had found out already what a very difficult task she had in hand.

"Go down stairs, Pearl," she said, rather crossly, to the small maiden, who was clinging to Ronald's arm, and engaging the best part of his attention. "I can't think why your nurse leaves you worrying here!"

The nurse appeared at that moment, a plump, comely woman, in a blue linen dress and white cap. She looked at Ronald, and their eyes met. It was Hester Dixon, he knew it at once. Nothing would have convinced him he was mistaken.

What in the world was she doing here? why had a woman, used to command a dozen servants, and who admitted that she had "saved money," stooped to become Mrs. Cooper's nurse?

"That's a Radlan face," he said to Lucie, as Hester and the little girl disappeared; "but I never saw her at your house there."

"My sister engaged her at a moment's notice, she is a widow, and very anxious to return to England. I suspect she came with us for the sake of the free passage. Mary likes her, but I am frightened of her. There seems to be something treacherous about her eyes."

And for once Lucie Taylor, despite her silly manners and hasty conclusions was perfectly right.

(To be continued).

The German custom of some one going, in a state of nudity, at midnight on Christmas-eve, to bind the fruit trees with ropes of straw, or the frugal housewives shaking the crumbs from the table-cloth around their rooms in order that they become more fruitful, clearly points to the mysterious influence attributed by the ancient Germans to the time of the Twelve Nights. In the Tyrol the fruit trees for a similar reason, are soundly beaten.

DECIMA'S ORDEAL.

CHAPTER I.

THE windows were open, and the draft occasioned by the passage of air from the fan-light over the door commingling with the circulation through the casement touched agreeably the brow of a young man who sat, with palette, brushes and maul-stick, gazing critically upon a portrait which rested on the easel before him.

The sun through the sky-light made the heat of the room rather greater than it otherwise would have been. But Graham Clinton worked on as diligently as if his daily bread depended upon the rapidity of the strokes of his skillfully wielded brush. Not that it did do so, for the clever young artist was one of those favourites of the gods who seemed to have reached the rainbow and its consequent bags of gold without the smallest effort upon his own part.

His brother artists sighed enviously.

"Not but what he deserves his success, you understand," they would explain to each other; "but if he were a poor devil without a penny to bless himself with the world would not take such pains to discover this remarkable talent of which they now seem so proud."

But Graham Clinton paid no attention either to their remarks or his own success. He loved art for art's sake, and he slaved and toiled early and late—not for the number of duets that resulted therefrom, but the glow of an ideal lightened and brightened his life. He had before him a grand ambition, and toward that goal every act of his life was to him a step. He wanted to be great, and to know that he deserved his greatness. He wanted no fame purchased by his social position and the wealth that had come to him as an inheritance through generations. He wanted not the glory of a day. He had no desire for that short-lived notoriety that made him the lion of the hour.

He wanted his name to go down to posterity. He wanted to feel within himself that future generations would know him even better than his contemporaries had done. And he deceived himself in nothing. He was his own severest critic. He spared himself in nothing. He grieved over his failures and delighted in his successes as a mother does over her best-loved child.

And that was the passion of his soul. He was living in dreams of the future.

He was thinking of that, perhaps, as he sat there upon that golden day in June, gazing at the ideal head upon the canvas, when a light quick knock sounded upon the door. In answer to a rather impatient "Come in!" the door opened, and a small figure, bearing a basket laden with flowers, entered.

It was a tiny, piquant face, with a singular perfection of beauty that touched his artist's soul with a sudden thrill. She was small, almost childlike in appearance; but there was a roundness, a willowy grace to her form that he had never seen equalled, and as she stood there in the centre of the floor, holding her basket up for his inspection, her exquisite face dimpling with a smile that seemed to be all in her eyes, though the dimples were near her mouth, he gazed in silence as he might have done at some masterpiece of art that touched and thrilled the last chord of his inner self.

"Want some flowers?" she asked, with an almost boyish intimation of speech and audacity.

Her voice was musical, in exact accord with her appearance, and the very slowness of her manner seemed to sit well upon her piquant self. Clinton's magnificent dark eyes softened as they rested upon her.

"Are you selling them?" he asked, scarcely conscious of what he was saying.

"You don't suppose I am giving them away, do you?" she questioned, naively.

"When I go to Colney Hatch it will be as an

attendant and not a lunatic, and don't you forget it! Want to buy?"

"Perhaps. Where do you live?"

"14, Peter's-street, Marylebone, third floor back. Would you like to know the number? If you will call, there might be something to interest your artistic eye there in the shape of Persian *portières* Sevres china, and Guido's masterpieces. We got the last named for returned tea-tickets. As my mother always teaches me to be entirely truthful, I had better add that it is not the original, but a copy. Would you like to know the brand of tea that they give them with?"

"Thanks, no. I never drink tea," returned Clinton, with perfect earnestness.

"You miss half the good of life," she said, with a grin. Then, turning to a stand of fading flowers, "That's about the best picture you've got here, isn't it? That is one thing that none of you fellows can do—you can't get over nature."

"I quite agree with you," he replied, studying admiringly the changes in her lovely countenance. "Did you ever have your portrait painted, little one?"

"Not I! One or two of the fellows have asked me, but I want no one to do that who is not a worthy successor of Rembrandt or Raphael. Perhaps Titian could do best, for he could catch the light in my hair that the others would fail upon. I think it would make me so seasick that I should never recover if I were to see chromos of myself like those I have seen of some ladies of society. I have been about artists' studios more or less all my life, and after the shocks I have received, I have schooled myself not to see the contents of their work-rooms at all."

"Are you so good a judge?"

"Well, perhaps not in an artistic way, you understand; but I have absorbed a sort of knowledge of things in general regarding art that I couldn't have escaped if I had tried. It had to come to me like the measles and chicken-pox come to more fortunate children. I don't know anything else."

"Do you come from a family of artists, then?"

"Yes. My grandfather was Brandon Keith. My father was Arthur Keith."

The names she had mentioned were so well known in the art world that Graham Clinton sprang to his feet.

"You don't mean it?" he cried. "Why, my prize possession is a painting by Brandon Keith. They were the greatest artists—But, pardon me, how—"

He could not complete his sentence, but stopped in considerable embarrassment.

"How does it come that I am selling flowers in the streets?" she said, quietly, though a trifle bitterly, finishing his sentence for him.

"Do you remember the old quotation from *Pinafore*: 'Things are seldom what they seem?' It has been so in our case. You know my father's misfortune. The whole world knew it. What he made one day he spent the next. The picture-dealers got the money that rightfully belonged to him, and nobody ever found out that he was great, until after he was dead and my poor mother a pauper."

Clinton tried to find something to say, but somehow he felt tongue-tied in presence of that tiny flower-girl who stood there before him like a small princess in disguise. He could not express his sympathy for her in words, but there was a note in his voice far more eloquent when he said—

"And your mother. She's alive?"

"Yes," answered the girl, her great eyes roving to the window sadly, her lip quivering under an emotion that she was striving to conceal. "She is alive, but—Don't make me speak of it, sir. My mother is dying as rapidly as a woman can who is on her feet from morning until night. She won't give up and some night—"

She did not finish her sentence, but turned suddenly and was walking rapidly toward the door when Clinton caught her arm.

"You must not go—at least not yet," he cried, his own voice trembling as he saw the white anguish of her face. "I admired the work of your grandfather and of your father as I have done that of no modern artist. You must let me come and see your mother for your father's sake. You must—"

"No, you can't do that. She is very proud. She does not know that I sell flowers, and it would break her heart if she did. She thinks that I am in a situation in a shop, but I lost my position there and did not care to tell her for fear the shock would kill her. We are very poor. There is an old blind florist that has a place not far from our house, and I sell for him. We divide the profits, and she knows nothing of it. I think it would kill her outright if she knew I am in the streets all day. I have sold them for a year now, and she has never suspected. I have my regular customers—and it pays better, much better than the shop. But she is growing weaker every day. There is not a night that I go home that I cannot see the change the day has brought. Oh, sir, I try to be brave, but it is breaking my heart!"

"Poor Child. Poor little one!" whispered Clinton, more touched than he remembered ever to have been before. "How strangely hard life is for some, and so easy—so easy for others who could better bear the trials. But you must let me come to see her—your mother, you know. You must let me, for your father's sake, you understand. Come, look here! You see I am not a bad artist, as modern ones go. Look at this. I am going to ask your mother's consent to paint your portrait."

He had turned her around and led her toward the canvas, which, though incomplete, showed the superb talent of the painter. Her face brightened as if under the influence of sunshine.

"Oh, I say, did you do that?" she cried, in such genuine surprise and admiration that he laughed outright.

"Yes," he answered.

She did not speak for many minutes, but stood there apparently drinking in the work of art in supreme delight.

"Your drawing, your colouring, your technique, your style are perfect!" she cried, at last, with suppressed enthusiasm. "Ah, you work from love! It is there in every sweep of the brush. Your fame is a dowry from Heaven. An unfinished portrait such as that, even if you were to die to-night, would perpetuate your name through all the ages."

Clinton's face flushed as he listened. All his life he had received praise, but none had gone to his heart like that.

"Who is she?" asked the girl, nodding at the canvas. She is the most beautiful woman I ever saw!"

"She is an ideal. I thought her beautiful, until I saw you. Pardon me; I don't wish to be rude. I may surely admire the work of God even as you admire mine. Not to the woman, but the artistic model, I say you are the most exquisite piece of moulding that I have ever seen. For the sake of art, let me paint you. You have the soul of an artist. It is born in you. I beg it as a favour—for the sake of the beloved mistress of both our hearts, let me paint you!"

She put out her hand and raised her eyes humid with tears.

"It shall be my humble contribution to your future greatness," she said, softly. She did it for love of art. Is it God who rules events such as that? Can it be that He, who doeth all things rightly and well, writes in the book of predestination a situation such as that, with the awful future veiled?

CHAPTER II.

"Decima!"

There was a rather heavy brush between Graham Clinton's teeth which thickened his articulation a trifle, but not sufficiently to

make the word understood. His eyes were fixed upon the portrait and not the model. She heard, but waited for him to continue. He repeated,—

"Decima!"

"H'm!"

"Are you tired?"

"Dead-tired! My neck is cramped and both arms are fast asleep."

"Let us rest awhile. My fingers are paralysed from holding this palette."

"That is why you thought of my fatigue, I suppose."

He laughed as he laid his brushes and palette away.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You are idealising again. I thought you were going to paint me as I am."

"I am. I have. One cannot improve upon the idealisation of Heaven. I could not paint you as beautiful as you are without an inspiration from Heaven."

He spoke with suppressed enthusiasm, as he always did when her beauty was referred to. The speech was followed by an embarrassed silence on the part of Decima Bruce. Clinton observed it, and wishing to relieve her, exclaimed, briskly,—

"Look at that!" holding up his middle finger for her inspection. "I did not feel it while I was at work, but see how the brushes have pinched my finger. They usually callous it and make it sore, but this is a regular blood-bliester."

"Let me open it from the under side," said Decima, turning in a business-like way from the contemplation of her own pictured, poetical beauty to the most prosaic matter of relieving a blood-bliester. "Where are your needles? Ah, here!"

She selected one, and kneeling beside him, took his hand in hers. As she bent her pretty head above it, a slow flush mounted from Graham Clinton's throat to his brow. A soft light burned in his superb eyes such as no woman had been able to call there before. A smile trembled upon the corner of his finely cut mouth, and for the first time in his life he realised that love of a woman was master of love of art; that there was something besides a canvas and brushes in the world; that the human heart was the perfected work of God, and that his had been played upon by the great Guiding Hand.

He forgot all else than that. He cared to remember nothing. He knew that he loved the girl who was there so closely beside him, with his hand clasped in hers almost tenderly, and—

He did not complete the thought, for she had lifted her head and was about to rise.

"There!" she exclaimed. "I don't think you will have any more trouble with that. You are ruining your hands."

He watched her rise as one watches a sunbeam go. He looked at her hungrily, yearningly, for a moment; then he too rose, with a sigh smothered in his heart, and rapidly walked the floor with bent head, evidently thinking deeply, unhappily.

The mental conflict had whitened his lips and drawn his brows, but Decima did not see. Something in his manner had made her nervous, though she could scarcely have told what, and she had turned to his desk, upon which were scattered numerous sketches and photographs in artistic negligence. She was turning them over carelessly, almost without seeing them, when he approached and stood beside her for some minutes in silence. He was not looking at her, but down at the tiny brown hands that were fluttering in and out among the pictures; and his thoughts were away as well.

He was thinking of the woman who held his promise of marriage—thinking of how little she knew the meaning of love compared with this grand passion that he felt for this flower-girl with her artist's soul. He was wondering if honour was the rivet in a loveless bond, or if honour did not compel him to

break it. And then Decima glanced up with a smile, and he met her eye.

The work was done.

He forgot that other woman to whom his pledge belonged. His passion had crept from his heart to his head and entangled his brain. He leaned forward and slipped his arm about the girl, drawing her to his breast.

"Decima," he whispered, "are you too much an angel to know the meaning of love?" His arm held her; his hand pressed her cheek down upon his bosom. She did not reply, but lay there trembling, with downcast eyes and flushed face, making no endeavour to release herself.

"Sweetheart," he whispered again. "Look at me! Have I frightened you? Forgive me! The strength of my love is so great that I can control it no longer! Have you not seen how it was with me? Could you not read all the struggle in my heart?—Ah, Decima, speak to me!"

She lifted her eyes, a smile of heavenly happiness in their depths.

"What is there to say?" she asked.

"That you love me!"

"Would you know it better than than now? Can you not feel it?"

Clinton smiled—a little staggering sort of effort.

"I want to hear you say it," he answered, tenderly. "I want to know it from your lips. My darling—darling, if you knew how my love has mastered me! It is the one thought of my heart—the strongest emotion of my soul! Decima, answer me!"

She lifted herself in his arms just a trifle, and smiled up at him with almost-delirious ecstasy.

"You want my lips to speak the words that my heart has said to you a thousand times?" she questioned, happily. "I love you! Is it enough?"

"Yes, if love means to you what it does to me. I have never loved before; and I have lived much longer than you. Oh, dearest heart! there is such sweetness, such joy in holding you in my arms and knowing that your life is mine!"

"And it is all yours!"

He bent his head and kissed her—a long, passionate embrace that contained nothing of impurity, nothing that could tarnish her perfect chastity.

He was striving to control his emotion as much as possible, lest he alarmed her; but it required a tremendous effort. His entire self seemed submerged in the overwhelming desire to have her for his own. Great passions come to great natures suddenly, and his left no room for any other thought.

For some time there was silence between them, when each seemed listening to the beat of the other's heart; then, with his lips upon her own, Clinton whispered,—

"When will you be my wife, my own?"

"Not yet," she answered. "You must wait. Not long; you know; but until my mother is better."

"It must be soon. There are so many things that I have to tell you; but just at first I want to feel the sweetness of your love without thinking of the past. You trust me, do you not?"

"Absolutely!"

"And yet there are some things in my life which you must know—some things which you must hear from me alone. If I could only make my life a clean page like yours, for your sake, my love, I should be so glad—so glad!"

"I am satisfied with you as you are. If you were different in one thing my love would of necessity be less. Oh, how can you, so great, so grand, care for an insignificant creature such as I?"

"There is no woman under Heaven's sun to compare with you. Your beauty never has and never will be reproduced. Your purity is as great as that of an angel. Your soul is that of an artist. Does mortality go beyond

that? Dearest love, if I were but worthy of you my happiness would be too complete!"

"Hush! I am half afraid of my own joy. There has been so little of sunshine in my life that it seems to me that the cloud must come while I am basking in the delicious warmth. I have felt that you cared, yet I dared not frame the thought."

"You are the one and only love of my life, my own; yet there are things that you must know."

"No. I am more than satisfied with that. Let the rest go. What is your part to me? Is it the future that is mine and Heaven's?"

He kissed her once again with reverent devotion.

"And Heaven deal with me according to my fidelity to you!" he said, slowly, the flush of ideal passion upon his cheek.

CHAPTER III.

THREE months lay in the dead past, for happiness and beauty and love must die, even as misery and hatred are included in dissolution. Two months lay dead, yet unborn, still held under the caress of memory.

How happy these two were, Decima and Graham Clinton. Life was like the sun in the middle-day sky to them. They saw nothing but each other, heard nothing but each other, wanted nothing but each other. They spoke to each other in sighs, in glances and caresses. They adored each other, content in silence.

The portrait progressed slowly. To Clinton, Decima seemed to grow more beautiful with each hour, and where at first he had been satisfied with his work he now found flaws—defects that no care or pain could erase.

"You are too beautiful for any but a god to paint, my little princess!" he said to her often. "I must give it up. If you were dead, and I saw you only by the light of memory, I could do it then, and the world would call famous, but never while you are before me. I see too clearly then how short I fall of the perfection of the original, and the failure disheartens me. I must be satisfied with the possession of the fairest flower of the universe, even if I can not make it live for future ages."

But still the sittings continued. Each day he scarcely seemed to live until he heard her well-known tap upon the door; then, having opened,—

"When are these partings to end, my little princess?" he said to her one day as she was leaving him. "When are you to become my wife before all the world?"

"Soon, Graham," she answered, with that upward glance that expressed her love so well. "Not quite yet. I am foolish, but the thought of change hurts me. Wait until my mother is better. Then, dear heart—shall we be so happy—after?"

"Does it make you happy to go from me? It will be an eternal union!"

She looked at him without replying. There was a long caress, so deep, so tender, so true. What is there left in life to one who has tasted so much bliss?

She went out into the early gloaming of that still September day, her heart light under the flutterings of love. There was a song in her soul—a song of gratitude to God for the richness of his blessing. She noticed nothing of the busy, bustling world about her. She paid no heed to where she was going, but walked more by instinct—from habit—than from any sight that directed her. Her thoughts were filled with him whom she had left behind. When she came to their poor home she paused and sighed.

Was not there something in contrast? Would life be the same to her when she had left that wretched place for ever? At least there was happiness with Graham Clinton, wherever she might be. Comforted by that

thought, she mounted the long, steep flight of stairs and very softly opened the door.

Instead of the pale face of her mother that had always greeted her, she was met by a lady charmingly though simply attired, her pure, noble, high-bred face wearing an anxious look. She had removed her hat and gloves, the jewels upon her hands looking strangely out of place in that poorly-furnished room.

"You, Miss Mortimer, and at this hour!" exclaimed Decima, her face growing pale under an intangible fear. "Has anything happened?"

Before replying, Alice Mortimer took the beautiful face between her hands and kissed it.

"I hope nothing serious, *mignonne*," she answered, gently. "I called to-day to see your mother, knowing that she had not been well of late, and I found her more ill than I thought. I persuaded her to go to bed, and summoned a doctor."

"And now?" gasped Decima.

"She has not been well, you know. The doctor says—"

"What?"

"Don't be frightened, *mignonne*. It is so difficult to tell in these early stages; and he may be mistaken after all."

"But he said—"

"Something about—small pox!"

"Ah, Heaven!"

The girl staggered back; but the tender arms of the woman of society supported her, leading her to a chair close by.

"You need your strength, dear child; and she needs you, too. She has called for you so often—so often during the last two hours."

Decima coloured painfully as she remembered where she had been, forgetful of all save her own selfish joy, her own boundless love. Then the thought of Miss Mortimer's danger came to her.

"Great heavens!" she cried, starting up in wild horror; "you should not be here. Oh! why have you remained? Why did you not go when he told you the hideousness of it all? Have you forgotten? Don't you remember the frightful—"

She seemed unable to continue, and Miss Mortimer smiled.

"I am not afraid, dearest," she said, soothingly. "If one's friends think of self in moments like this, where would the charity of the world be? The terrible epidemic is raging, Decima, you will, not therefore, find many that will stand by you now. Every one is afraid. You must not let any one suspect in the house. We are doing everything possible to prevent the disease getting through the house in the event of its proving what we fear. You understand? I have persuaded the doctor that it will not be necessary to send her away until—until we know beyond a doubt."

"Away! Where?"

"There are places, you know—"

"You mean the Small Pox Hospital."

Miss Mortimer did not reply.

"Great—"

"Hush!" she whispered. "Did I not tell you that I had persuaded the doctor not to send her?"

"Not until he knows!"

"But he will never know until she is well, or, Decima, you are very beautiful, child. Would you—"

But the girl seemed to divine what her friend, or more than friend, would say, and with a gesture of horror she put out her hand.

"Don't say it!" she cried. "Don't think me so vile! Have I been neglectful of her? Forgive me—forgive me! I love her—oh! how I love her! It will kill me if—"

"But it won't come to that!" interrupted Miss Mortimer. "We won't allow it to come to that. I am going to remain, you know—all the time, you understand. We will nurse her, you and I, night and day. We will save her; and after that her health will be better

than ever, for it clears the system, this disease, and after it one is always so well."

As she listened to the kind voice trying to cheer her, Decima's courage gave way, and leaning her head upon her friend's shoulder, she burst into bitter tears.

"You are the best friend a woman ever had," she said to Alice; when her tears had ceased to flow. "One would know how to give up life—more than that—love, for you. Some time I shall find a way to repay you."

Then she went to her mother.

The next morning she got a boy to take a note to Graham Clinton. It was brief.

"Love,—Do not expect me until you hear again. My mother is ill—dying, perhaps. I dare not tell even you what is wrong. Do not come. I do not ask, but command it. Trust me. With my heart, your own, DECIMA."

And then these two—the lady and the flower-girl—went on with their work, nursing that frail form back to life again. And, ha, what weary work it was! As they knelt beside the bed, one night, watching the poor face, Decima took the noble one of her friend between her hands.

"Think," she exclaimed, with dull anguish, "Think of your face being like that! Think of the hideous mark each one of those awful pustules will leave. Have you no thought of self? Are you an angel?"

Miss Mortimer smiled.

"Only a woman," she answered, gently. "Is not that enough? Must a woman be always a vain coward? Dearest little one, I told you once that if you ever needed a friend you should call upon me. You see, I found it out for myself, and the friend is here."

"Heaven bless her!"

And so the days lengthened and vanished, a week came and went; then the doctors told them one morning that Mrs. Bruce would live. It came almost with a greater shock to Decima than had the knowledge of her illness, for she had almost despaired; but when she could choke her heart into subjection she turned, with the tears streaming over her face, and threw her arms about Miss Mortimer's neck.

"What do I not owe you?" she cried. "You have saved her—my dear, dear mother! I owe her life to you—it is worth more than mine, much more. Without you I could have done nothing—nothing! Thank Heaven, thank you—my noble, noblest friend!"

CHAPTER IV.

THEY were seated in the conservatory, beautifully, artistically filled with tropical plants, those two—Decima Bruce and Alice Mortimer. It was the home of the latter, magnificent in its combinations of modern comfort and antique loveliness—a fit setting for a gem so rare as Alice Mortimer.

She was not beautiful, in so far as regularity of feature constitutes beauty; but there was a grace of carriage, a nobility of bearing, a *grande dame* manner that far surpassed all that. She was as generous as nature, as true as death, and there was something about her that seemed to tell it to you in a language that was unmistakable. To Decima she combined all the virtues with none of the vices of the goddesses of old. She worshipped her. She felt herself capable of any heroic sacrifice for the sake of her friend, and she cordially returned the flower girl's affection.

It was the first time that Decima had left her mother after the long and painful illness that had confined her for so tedious a time, and a smile of hope and happiness rested upon the charming lips that Miss Mortimer kissed.

"It seems as if she were really well, to see you little one," Miss Mortimer said, tenderly. "It was good of you to come to me first, *mignonne*."

"And where should I have gone first if not to you?" asked Decima, pressing the hand she held, while long repressed tears filled her eyes.

"What friend have I so good, so true as you? Did ever a woman live so self-forgetful, so noble, so—"

"There—there!" interrupted Miss Mortimer, with a light, happy laugh. "Why, you would make me so vain, child, that my closest friend would find disgust for me instead of affection."

"I should like to tell the whole world what you have done for me."

"And I should be bitterly offended if you should. I have no desire to pose as a heroine, Decima. I am a very happy woman, little one, and it is my greatest pleasure to show my gratitude to God for His goodness to me, who deserve it so little, by any work that comes in my way, by any little deed of kindness to a fellow-creature. I don't want thanks. I don't want advertisement to the world. I only desire the approval of my own conscience, which contains the approbation of Heaven. Do you think that the bravos of the world could make me happier than I am?"

Decima glanced about her admiringly.

"You have everything to make life beautiful," she said, softly.

An expression such as she had never seen upon it before crossed Miss Mortimer's face. It seemed to be illumined with a holy, a divine love, such as dawns but once in life, and hovers then upon the soul but a moment, too dear and too sweet even to be held by the breath of the heart.

"And yet you see so little of what I really have," she answered, a tender throb in her voice. "Ah, if I could only tell you! Did you ever realise, Decima, that there is something in life that goes beyond expression? Did you ever think that there is one emotion in life that the tenderest word will wound? Ah! child, you will never have lived until you have loved!"

Decima dropped upon her knees, her hands holding those that rested upon her friend's lap, her glowing eyes raised.

"And you have loved like that?" she whispered.

"Like what? Have I said anything—expressed anything? How little it was; how short of the reality! Surely there must be some word beyond love to express it! It is so weak, so impotent! And yet there can be none, for God is love, and there is nothing beyond Him. But you can't understand, and I can't explain. He is a god—so handsome, so chivalrous, so noble! I wish I could tell you. But there are no words. I seem to be like a tiny child groping in the wilderness of its little heart for a word that it has never learned to utter to express a thought that is pressing upon its tender soul. Ah, love is my heart, my soul! Decima, listen. Can you realise what it is to love so that one would die denied the love that has become more than life?"

She was looking at the girl at her feet so earnestly, so scrutinisingly that the lovely face fell.

Could she, Decima Bruce, understand a life like that—she who had known Graham Clinton? She almost laughed aloud at the thought. Then, very slowly, she lifted her head until her lips touched those of her friend.

"I can understand," she whispered, "for I too love and am loved!"

A close, warm embrace followed; then Decima sat there upon the floor with her exquisite reddish-gold head upon Miss Mortimer's knee, the long, slim fingers of the woman of fashion flashing in and out of the sunny rings. There was a dreamy smile upon the lips of each. They spoke little. There seemed to be nothing to say. Then Alice leaned over and touched her friend's cheek.

"And this man who has won your heart," she said, softly—"what of him my little Decima? Does he love you as you deserve?"

"More! He adores me as I worship him."

"How happy we both are! God bless you, dear. And we love each other, do we not, Decima?"

"So much!" answered the girl, looking up contentedly. "You gave me my mother's life, and, besides, that there is a bond of sympathy between us now that no time can ever destroy. If I were sure of the granting of any favour that I should ask of Heaven it would be that He should give me some way so prove my devotion to you, my more than friend. Don't tell me that it is foolish. I know it but too well. Yet there is something in my heart that tells me—"

"What?"

"I don't know. I can't quite understand. But it is coming, coming! Dearest, kiss me once again."

When the head was raised from the requested caress, a servant stood there.

"A gentleman is in the drawing-room, Miss Mortimer," she said, quietly.

Then, when he had gone, Alice sprung up. The matronliness had left her face. She was suddenly the blushing, thrilling girl aware of the presence of her lover. She pressed another quick kiss upon Decima's brow.

"It is he," she whispered—"he of whom I told you! Wait for me here. He never remains long when he calls at this hour. He is a great artist, Decima, and his work divides his heart with me."

She was gone before Decima could reply; but the girl sat still upon the floor, looking after her with that same lazy, tender smile.

"A great artist!" she whispered to herself. "I wonder what he is like? Oh, he ought to be a wonderful man that could win a heart like hers! How good and great of soul she is! I should like to see what manner of man could win such love from a woman like Alice Mortimer. I wonder if he too paints portraits, or if he only does animals or landscapes? I should like to see him. I wonder if there would be any harm in my just taking a single glance at him? I am sure she would not mind, or she would not have told me of her love. I should be so proud to have her see Graham, and I am quite sure—Just one little glance. Dear Miss Mortimer! How much I love her, and how much I love her!"

She crept up and advanced noiselessly. The conservatory was separated from the drawing-room by a small reception-room and a heavy portiere. Silently she stepped through. The portiere was drawn a trifle aside. Miss Mortimer had evidently stopped for something on the way, for she was just entering the room from an opposite door. A tall, manly form rose to greet her. Decima saw only the back, yet her heart seemed to cease its beating.

With graceful step he went forward. The sweet, blushing face was raised for the kiss that fell only upon the brow.

"Ah! surely that was not the kiss of a lover! A brother might have implanted it there, but never the man to whose keeping a girl has given her very soul."

Decima had grown as white as death. Her limbs were rigid. She tried to move, but she seemed chained to the spot. She would have fled, if only the power had been given her, from—she knew not what. But she could not. Every drop of blood in her veins seemed stagnated, yet her senses were peculiarly alive.

She saw with horror the same deathless adoration that had gleamed in those pure eyes a few brief moments before—that devotion that had filled her with admiration, yet now paralysed her with terror. Then the two turned.

Her very soul died in that instant. What kept back the mad anguish that burst through every fibre of her being? What prevented the wild groan of the broken heart? What hushed the death-gurgles in the throat of love? Only Heaven knew.

She stood there motionless as a statue, dead to every sensation that the human breast

can know. For the man before her was Graham Clinton.

In those words lay the death-warrant—nor that alone; it was the crucifixion of a heart. She felt it die as emotion died. Then very slowly she turned, stricken dumb and blind, and turned and crept away.

She felt nothing, thought nothing. She was dead and the world was dead, and even God had died when the warmth had left the sun.

It was Graham Clinton whom Alice Mortimer loved—whom Alice had said was more to her than her life! And what was it that Alice was to her? She had forgotten.

There was no hat upon her head, no scarf about her throat as she crept from the house. She had forgotten.

But suddenly—what was it? Has a thought power to lift dissolution? something penetrated through the awful density upon her brain—a remembrance so horrible that it seemed to set her flesh on fire. She put her hands up to her poor ghastly face; but the hideousness of her terror was too great even to admit a groan. How dared she face that awful knowledge? She had known it herself less than a week. She had meant to tell him that very day—he who would so soon have been her husband; yet now, what was she to do?

The river seemed the only haven open to her. Would not Heaven find an excuse for her in the burden that had so suddenly—oh, Heaven! how piteously sudden!—grown too heavy for her to bear?

The knowledge that her friend loved him was surely enough; but this other thing—this hideous secret that now she dared not tell, weighed upon her soul with a heaviness greater than death!

CHAPTER V.

No thought of blame or censure entered Decima's heart toward the man whom she loved.

She seemed, with that intuitive perception which is a woman's dower right, to understand without a syllable of explanation the situation in which Clinton was placed, but the comprehension helped her extremity not in the least. The circumstances which surrounded her were, to a woman of her natural refinement of birth and breeding—for no poverty can alienate inborn mental delicacy—a source of anguish too great for either words or thought. She knew that something must be done. But what—what?

The day was deliciously warm, fanned by a breeze that was balmy as spring. A curious indolence seemed to rest over nature that imparted a feeling to her sensitive soul which she could not have analysed even had she tried.

The leaves in the park were turning to crimson and gold, and through them she walked onward, down to the lake that rippled so silently and peacefully on its monotonous way. She sat down, hidden by the still thick foliage of the shrubbery, and lifted her aching eyes to the clear blue of the sky.

The frightful pain of that awakening thought was still stabbing through the paralysis upon her brain and heart with hideous insistence. What was she to do? She asked the question of Heaven, yet the voice of Heaven was silent.

Was she suffering for sin committed? Who shall answer?

She knew that Graham would marry her if she would permit it; but then what of Alice Mortimer, that woman to whom she owed more than her life?

"I can't! I can't!" she groaned at last to that voiceless sun that answers but the command of Heaven. "Lord, I have prayed for some way to show her my gratitude. Is this the answer to my prayer? What right have I to take from her her lover? He was hers before he was mine. Oh, Father in Heaven,

help me! Am I to give my honour in exchange for my mother's life? Am I? It is too bitter! Yet the sin, the shame is mine already. It was hidden from me then under the greatness of my love, but I see it now cruelly clear. Shall I save myself at the cost of the happiness of the noble woman who risked more than her life for me and mine? Never! At any cost—at any cost I shall do my duty! Heaven help me to be brave!"

She bowed her head and groaned, such a groan as would have touched the heart of a satyr. No tears came to relieve her. She fought out her horrible battle with the lake, the sun, and the silent face of Heaven to witness—fought her battle to victory; but the field was marked with the blood-stain of a dead heart. You who are mothers can best understand.

Then she rose, her numb, stiff limbs feeling like wooden things beneath her, and walked slowly out of the park. Her poor white face was set and pitiful, but as emotionless as cold, pale snow. With mechanical correctness she hailed an omnibus, got in, paid her fare and rode northward. People looked at her curiously, for she was hatless, and there was a look upon her face that riveted attention; but she apparently saw nothing. She got out at the proper crossing and entered the street where Graham Clinton had his studio.

She was admitted and passed silently up toward the door of the room where she had been so madly happy, almost forgetful of those old days in the dear, dead past, so curiously close, yet so strangely long ago. She heard his voice singing, that rich, full baritone that she had so admired in the days that were dead, and paused until he had finished,—

"I need no stars in heaven to guide me,

I need no sun or moon to shine.

While I have you, sweetheart, beside me,

While I know that thou art mine."

There was not a sob in her throat, not a tear dimmed her eye as she heard the little love song, knowing so well that it was of her he was thinking, and without a knock she opened the door and entered.

He was sitting before the easel and did not hear her until she stood beside him; then he threw down his brush stick and sprang up.

"How long have you been away, love!" he cried.

And then he saw her face.

A little, quickly strangled cry escaped him. He grew white to the lips and staggered back, without touching her.

"Decima!" he whispered.

She did not reply. He caught the back of the chair for support, add after a moment recovered himself.

"Decima," he repeated, "what has happened? Your mother—"

"Is well," she answered wearily, raising her hand to lift the little damp curls from her brow.

"But you? What in Heaven's name has happened? Speak to me! I am frightened."

"What shall I say?" she questioned, slowly. "What is there that one can say? What has happened? I don't know! That is—I don't know at all! I have come to say good-bye to you, Graham."

"Good-bye?"

"Yes—eternally!"

He looked silently at her for a moment, as if doubting her sanity; but there was too much still death in her eyes for him to think of that.

"What is it that you mean?" he asked, hoarsely. "I don't seem to understand. Am I dreaming, or are you mad?"

"Would to Heaven it were one of the two," she answered, in a passionless way; "but it is neither."

"You wish me to understand that our love is at an end?"

"Our sin, Graham."

"Sin?"

"Oh, don't! It is so hard. Dear, don't think I doubt you! To doubt Heaven would be as possible as that. Graham, why did you not tell me, darling? Why did you not let me know before?"

There was no emotion in her questions. It would have been a thousand times easier if these had been.

He shivered.

"Speak out, for Heaven's sake!" he cried, heavily. "What is it that you mean?"

"About Alice Mortimer!" she answered, slowly.

A crimson flush crossed cheek and brow, yet there was an expression of intense relief in his countenance.

"I have been a great coward, Decima," he returned, in a shamed voice. "Desire to avoid giving pain has always been the weakness of my character; but you will forgive me that, will you not, my little princess? I will go at once and—"

She stopped him with a gesture.

"There is no forgiveness between you and me," she said, huskily. "I have loved you; if my heart were not quite dead I should love you still with a great love that is beyond earth, but I see now how I have sinned. Do you know what punishment Heaven has sent me for that sin?"

She paused, looking at him with those great, black eyes that bewildered him. He dared not reply.

"Truth demands that I give you up—that I see you no more. Hush!" as he was about to speak "wait! Do you know who came to us when we were deserted by the whole world? Alice Mortimer. Do you know who held my father's hand and soothed his last days on earth, giving him the comforts that our poverty would have denied us the power of doing? She did. Do you know who kept my mother from the poor-house and me from being a beggar? It was she. Do you know to whom I owe my mother's life in this last terrible affliction that was sent upon us? To her. Do you know to whom I owe the fact that my mother does not lie in the cemetery to-day, sent there from the hospital? To Alice Mortimer."

Her voice died away in a whisper. Clinton had grown paler and paler as she was speaking. He had not known Decima all these long happy months without discovering something of the strength of her character, and as she continued, the whole situation was before him as clearly as she could have put it by the loud-estmentations.

He knew that her sense of duty, mistaken though it might be, had been aroused, and he knew that he had lost her.

He could not have spoken if his life had depended upon it. There was a silence between them that was horrible; then, with a long, weary sigh, she continued,—

"I see that you understand, and that you agree with me that we must part."

"But I don't!" he cried, passionately. "I don't, and I never shall! She is good and noble, it is true; but why should that fact spoil both your life and mine? I do not love her; so help me Heaven, I never have!"

"But she is your promised wife."

"Through no fault of mine, I swear it! Listen, Decima!"

"Please don't! It is so useless—so unutterably useless. She loves you. She held your promise before I had ever seen your face. That I should have stolen your heart from her is the very greatest wrong that I could have committed; but I shall wrong her no further. Oh, do you think I have not thought it all out? Do you think that I have not suffered until there is no heart left in my body to suffer more? Great Heaven! Ten thousand deaths by slowest torture could never equal the anguish that I have endured! Do not make me suffer more than I have, Graham! Say farewell to me, dear, and let me go!"

"Never!"

"Then I must go without."

She held up her hand, and by the expression of her face he knew that her resolve was deathless.

"You must!" she exclaimed, slowly. "My resolution is taken, and nothing can move me. It is my duty, the atonement that I must make for my sin. If you would spare me, go on and do your duty to her. It is the single demand that I make of you for your part in the great wrong that has been done. If you have any love in your heart for me you will do this for my sake. It is the only thing in all this world that can bring me the slightest happiness. You see, I feel nothing. My heart is as dead as that face that lies beneath your brush upon the senseless canvas. It is an eternal farewell, and if you have any pity you will try to have it for my sake!"

CHAPTER VI.

Who shall describe the hideousness of the death in life that accompanies a broken heart? Surely not we who have seen it so many times in this cruel old world—seen it in the beamless eye, heard it in the changeless sigh, felt it in the cold emotionless tones of the once joyous, care-free voice.

It was so with Decima.

Do you think there was a moment in the day, an hour in the long, bitter night when she could close her heart to the knowledge of the frightful calamity that had come into her life? Weeks were into months until three had fled; but still she bore it helplessly—bore it with a shuddering sorrow that was piteous.

The letters of pleading that had come from Graham Clinton had grown too painful for her to read, and standing as she did in fear of her own courage, in face of an awful grief like hers—of a hideous secret that weighed down her very soul, she dared not read them longer, but put them aside with the seal unbroken. She did not try to conquer her love. On the contrary, she lived upon the memory of it.

She avoided Miss Mortimer for the first time within her remembrance, making an excuse whenever she knew that her old friend was coming to the house, and as the weeks went by it seemed to her mother that this evident fear of one whom she had so loved had become almost a mania.

"Decima," she said to her one day, very gently, when this avoidance had become a trifle more marked than usual, "can you not see that you are giving pain to the woman who has been the best friend we have ever known? She wants very much that you should come to see her. Why will you not?"

A spasm of pain contracted the changed but still beautiful face.

"I can not!" she cried, huskily. "Don't ask it! I can not!"

(To be continued.)

KIT.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BY AND BY, however, the wisdom conveyed in Constance's remonstrance came to Kit's comprehension, though she still had that strange feeling of repugnance to all thought of her cousin at this particular moment, still, as her brain grew less bewildered, she saw that Constance was right, and if she did not wish to court attention to the terrible state of affairs that now existed, she must wake from her dream of misery and put aside her conflict of hopes, fears, regrets, longings.

She went hastily to rejoin the others. No one noticed anything strange about Lady Desmond's appearance. She was never wont to have much colour, and of late it had been known she was not very strong, so her sudden

worn, wan look, which all her courage and her woman's natural artifice could not hide was unremarked except by Constance's lynx eyes and Chris' tender, honest ones.

The dance went on, the night wore away, one by one the guests straggled up to their rooms, and the servants had the hall to themselves. Kit watched the passage from the library with strained, hungry eyes, but neither Maurice nor Philip emerged from it. When Sybil came to kiss her, she clung a little to the gentle friend, and for the first time Sybil fancied something was wrong.

"What is it darling?" she whispered, eagerly. "Are you ill, Kit—tell me, you look so white and strange as if you were in great pain."

Kit caught at the suggestion.

"I am ill, Sybil, and the pain is awful. Don't look frightened, it is only—only my head, it is a nervous headache. I will go to bed, I am tired."

"Let me find Philip," Sybil said, deeply concerned. "I saw him go into his den with Maurice not very long ago, let me—"

But Kit shook her head firmly.

"No—no," she said. "I—I don't want to worry him and it will go. I know—it is only neuralgia it—it can't last long."

"Well let me see you to bed?" and then Sybil with her divine sympathy, determined to leave the girl alone. "No, I won't bother you. I know you are just like me, you are best by yourself when you are ill, but promise me you will go to bed soon—as soon as possible."

Kit kissed the anxious tender lips once—twice."

"I promise," she said, and Sybil went away uneasy yet unsuspecting, or fearing nothing but ill health. Kit left alone sat down in a corner of the deserted drawing room, the lights were nearly all extinguished, the fires burnt out, but she was not cold, from her corner she could see the library door, and she sat there waiting and watching. Would it never open, how long had they been there together? were they there still? what had happened? She gave a little cry of fear as someone came up to her, and then she clung to Chris' strong hands as she had done once before on that night in London.

"Oh, Chris! Chris!" she wailed.

He held her hands very tightly, and asked no question, for the moment. He felt that she would speak without question and his heart leaped with the sudden joy and hope of being able to help her.

She did speak in a moment, hurriedly not quite articulately, her voice was choked with anguish, with fear, with sorrow as she gave him the whole story of her trouble.

Chris listened quietly and tightened his hold on her hands.

"And Philip would not look at me not look, even when I tried to make him, he said some awful words, and—and he pushed me away from him, Chris—he pushed me away as though I were loathsome in his eyes—I think I nearly died in that moment, Chris! Oh! that it should have come to this, and I—I only thought to spare him. I would have spoken, oh! so often—so often but I could not bear to grieve him, and—and then her voice broke in a passion of sobs that shook her slender frame as though some rough storm were playing upon it.

Chris let her cry for a few moments, then he spoke, and his voice was wonderfully quiet and incisive, it was not the voice of a boy, but of a man with a man's wisdom, and a man's feeling in its every note.

"Kit," he said, quietly and tenderly, "don't fret—this shall all come right. I swear to you it will—it shall, but, oh! my dear, my dear, if only you had done as I told you the other night. Whatever your trouble was your husband was and is the proper, the only person to go to with it."

"I see it! Ah, how clearly I see it now!" the poor child cried, lifting her beautiful tear-stained face to his, "but don't you understand Chris—don't you understand?"

He answered her quickly.

"You have no need to ask me such a question, Kit—I, who know you so well. Yes, I understand all, everything. How I wish you had told me the whole truth long ago. From the first I felt Maurice Montgomery was a coward and a blackguard, but I did not think he was so bad as this."

Kit got up and moved to and fro. Her eyes went to that closed door so still and so dark in the darkness.

"Oh! I cannot bear the suspense, it is so awful. Oh! I must go, I must find him, I must hear him speak, I must tell him all I am suffering." She turned to leave the room, and then glanced back at Chris.

"Wait for me, I will come to you if—"

She would not finish her sentence, but in Chris's heart there was a heavy foreboding.

He had seen long enough with Philip Desmond to know what sort of man he was, and though Kit's story to him was full of truth as from itself, he knew that there was much which would seem terrible in a husband's eyes at least just at the first when the facts of the case had been so roughly brought to their husband's knowledge.

Kit went across the passage quickly, her heart beating in her breast like some wild thing struggling for freedom. The tear stains were on her face, and her eyes were filled with weeping as she reached the door and turned the handle.

The room was dimly lit. At first she thought it was empty, and she flattered in her heart ceased, and then—then she gave a low cry and ran across to where Philip sat by the table.

He was alone, his head bowed on his hands. She flung herself on the ground beside him and clung to him with her young arms.

"Oh! Philip, my husband! my husband!" she moaned.

Philip raised himself suddenly, and drew back from her touch as though it gave him acute pain.

"Don't," he said, hurriedly, and then in a low, cold voice he added, "Don't kneel to me, let us have no heroics."

He got on to his feet as he spoke, and drew her up too. At the sound of his voice a great chill ran through her.

He was no longer passionate or rough; he was quiet contained—cold as ice. He moved away from her to the fire and stood there, avoiding her big heart-searching eyes that were fixed on him in an agony of silence and suffering.

"I was just about to come to you," he said, speaking a little more quickly. "I have something to say to you, some questions to ask."

Kit was silent. She was leaning against the table, trembling a little but something of his coldness had entered her veins, for she seemed to have lost the consciousness of her feeling to be a little naive and dull.

She was conscious of the change in her, it seemed to come quite naturally; the horrible incongruity of their positions alone together in this silent room, yet so absolutely divided as though a crowd stretched between, even this did not seem strange in this moment.

Philip gazed straight at her. How beautiful she was how fair and young, the very semblance of all that was pure and good in life, and yet what a shame it all was. How false! how false! He turned from her roughly.

"After all," he said in a voice that was harsh and cut like a knife, "I am a fool. What need to ask questions? I know all there is to know now, better not tempt you to add more falsehoods to your already large burden."

Kit winced and trembled in every limb, but the scorn in his voice roused every grain of pride in her veins.

"I can scarcely believe this is you, Philip," she said in her low voice, weary with tears and suffering, "you who have always been so noble, so just, so merciful."

He was silent only an instant, and then turned on her almost furiously.

"Ah! you have found me an easy dupe, a fool blinded in the simplest fashion. A fool!—yes, that is what I have been, but by—I'll be so no longer."

The girl's heart was riven under all this anger, this passion of righteous indignation. The pain he was suffering rang out so clearly to her. How she longed to put her arms about him and hold him close to her heart—the heart that beat with so great, so true a love.

She tried to forget her own pain.

"Philip, will you grant me one favour? Will you listen to me? Not as you are now, oh! no, not; but as you have always been, generous, gentle, loving."

She broke off suddenly; and there was silence between them as she stood with her hands pressed over her hot eyes.

He bit his lip suddenly, love was stronger than anger for this moment.

"Yes, I will listen," he said, and though he spoke just as coldly, his heart gave a little leap.

She stood silent a little longer, with her pale tired lips she breathed a prayer for strength and help, and then with her face turned towards him, one small hand resting on the table, she began her story.

She told everything there was to tell. The whole truth of the quarrel with her aunt, of Constance's help, of the departure from Brookstone, of her arrival at the big house in Mayfair-square.

With gathered courage, she told of her sudden and unexpected meeting with Maurice, and Philip's brows contracted as he listened. Of his following her into the park, of her fear, then of her determination not to go out again alone in the daytime, then of the evenings when, with a sigh of relief, she had gone out of the big house into the square gardens.

In delicate, gentle words, that seemed to bring back that scattered atmosphere of her girlhood dreams, she spoke it all. She left nothing unsaid, even though she saw him start with sudden pain she went on with her story, dwelling with a sorrowful touch on the point when Maurice's infamy was thrust into her knowledge, and she had to listen to Sybil's gladness at the cost of her own.

In a few more words the story was told, miserable, overwhelming with fear and trouble as she was, the girl felt as though a load had been lifted from her breast.

At last! at last! she had spoken, and there was no longer that weighty secret in her heart to shadow her life and blight her love.

Philip did not move as she finished. His heart was too full of bitterness. The interview just passed between Maurice and himself, in which the young man had not spared himself, had increased rather than decreased this bitterness.

He knew Maurice loved Kit. From her own lips, he had just heard how nearly she had been to loving Maurice.

The difference between him, Philip Desmond, and this Maurice had never struck him until now. The difference between himself and Kit seemed to assume all at once grotesque, horrible proportions.

His pride was hurt, his age appeared something horrible. He covered his eyes with his hands, he could not look at her.

With a fast beating heart Kit drew near to him, her small hands going to his as they were wont to go for protection and strength.

"Philip," she said, in a voice that had sob in it, "I have told you all at last—at last. Oh! if you could only know how I have longed, how I have yearned to tell you this, and—and I could not do it, I could not give you such dreadful pain!"

He dropped his hand from his eyes and turned away.

"You preferred the pain should come from others," he said, with a hard laugh.

She grew cold and sick with dread at that sound.

"I hoped you would never know. I hoped to spare you always."

"You were too considerate."

The girl drew back with quivering lips.

"Ah! you are cruel! cruel!" she said, brokenly.

Philip turned on her fiercely.

"Let us not discuss cruelty. I thought I had learnt nearly all the lessons life can teach a man, but to night has given me a new one. I learn that a woman young, little more than a child, gentle, fair to the eyes, with a soft voice, and a heart apparently as pure as gold, can deal out as much cruelty as ever the brain or strength of man could devise!"

"You mean me?" Kit cried, bewildered, distraught. "You are speaking of me, Philip. You think I have been cruel. You think this of me. When—when?"

The facility of her self abnegation of her thought for him struck upon her in all its misery.

"If—if I could only have known. If I could only have known," she said to herself, almost wildly, and Philip laughed that hard, short laugh.

"The old cry. If you had only known so that you could have been better prepared, so that you could have shaped your story better, so—"

"Philip!" the word came from her lips with a short cry, wrong from her overladen heart.

There was an instant's silence, and then she spoke.

"You—you mean you do not believe me? You do not believe I am telling you the truth, that—that I have been silent all this time not because of why I have said; but—because—?" Words failed her, she almost reeled in the horror that oppressed her, she put out her weak, trembling hand. "You—you do not believe me, Philip. You—"

He put her hand on one side, quietly, coldly, as though the sight and the touch of it was as nothing to him. He answered her with absolute deliberation.

"I do not believe you! It is a pretty tale, it carries the sound of truth, it might and probably would convince many. It cannot convince me. I," with a bitter laugh, "I am too old. It takes more than fiction to convince an old man. Fast in this case is stronger than your fiction, pretty and delicate as it is!"

He paused, there was no sound from the young, trembling form beside him. Philip shut his eyes to the signs of her anguished face, to the sound of her quick, tortured breathing.

He loved her in this moment as he had never loved her before; but he did not yield to the temptation of her presence. His pride, his honour, all that constituted the meaning of his existence had been stabbed through and through to-night.

In the heat of us there is bad, the bad in Philip Desmond rose to the surface now as it had not risen since his early youth. Philosophy could not help him in this moment. Cynicism replaced the gentleness which justice and deep thought had cultivated so long. Jealousy, the most horrible element in the nature of humanity had scattered wisdom to the winds. He felt young and strong in that mystical youth which the knowledge of his many years had raised like a vision in his vanity, and yet he was conscious it was only a vision. The difference between Maurice, handsome, stalwart, irresistible and himself, maddened him in this moment.

He spoke truly to Kit when he told her he did not believe her. Against everything which his vanity might upraise Maurice appeared an insuperable victor, one against whom it was impossible to struggle. How could he when he knew now that Maurice loved her—loved her, with all the fire the passion of his young manhood with all the strength of his handsome being! What woman could turn from Maurice and willingly choose him?

Honour, esteem, respect, admiration, affection, these he might and could expect as his due—but love—love from Kit, from a girl, from one who by her confession had all but opened her heart to Maurice!

Was it so strange after all that Philip Desmond should deny her his belief?

He pushed her from him suddenly.

"Go!" he said, hoarsely. "Go—I—I am not sane to-night! I shall say things I would rather not say—leave me—I am best alone! Go!"

She stood gazing at him for an instant with her eyes blind with agony. She clung to his hands.

"Tell me you believe me—only that—only that you know I am true, and that I love you—better than my life—my soul—only that Philip—I want that, and I will go—yes, I will go. I will leave you alone; but—you will say that—my love—my husband!—You will say it. Oh, Heaven, I can't bear it! Philip, Philip—you—do you believe me?"

He drew his hands back from her, his ears were deaf to her grief, his eyes were blind to her anguish.

"I cannot!" he said, coldly. "She did not hear the catch in his voice. 'I cannot—I would not be the truth—for—I do not believe you—ask too much!'"

She let her hands drop, she stood for a second—it seemed an hour—he had turned his face to the dying fire, striking the coals into a blaze with his heel.

Like one groping in the dark Kit found the door, opened it, drew it after her, and stood outside in the passage. Her eyes were not closed, yet she saw nothing, and when Chris hurried to her she only shivered at first, and then as she realised the comfort of his presence, she put her hands into his.

"I am tired—he will not—he will not—" her dazed eyes looked into the boy's honest, sorrowful ones, there was a curious expression in her sight, her breath came short and quick, "is—it death, Chris—is it—"

The words died away in an inarticulate murmur, and Chris' strong arms closed about her slender form that had fallen, feeble and unconscious against his loyal heart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WINTER was gone, absolutely gone, dead and buried out of sight, not even a breath of cold east wind remained to whisper a remembrance of the dull dark days when roses were not, and the sun was hidden behind his veil of clouds and gloom.

Town was very full. Prognostications of a good season seemed likely to be fulfilled, and the hearts of the London tradesmen rejoiced. The June sunshine soaked up the streets, and illuminated the flower beds in the parks—it had a gentle golden remembrance for the smallest corner, and brought a sense of pleasure, of vigorous life in its radiant visit.

Lady Sinclair's smart little house in a street off Piccadilly was in a state of endless confusion. It was literally turned upside down, and a condition of bewilderment was the reigning atmosphere. With that good-nature that was so pre-eminently one of her leading characteristics, Lady Sinclair had placed her house, her servants, and herself at the disposal of her friend, Miss Marlowe, on the occasion of her marriage with the Honourable Hector Greaves, whose persistent adoration had at last been clothed with success.

Constance had not decided in a hurry, but she was none the worse for having delayed so long, for her fiancé had come into a considerable sum of money soon after Christmas, and there was every prospect of his stepping into the carload of Manchester before the year was out.

But if even these good things had not been added to the suit which Mr. Greaves had pursued with such patience and apparent hopelessness for so long a time, Miss Marlowe

would have been tempted to join her lot with his.

Life had been very dull and unprofitable to Constance Marlowe since Christmas. The fates decreed that she should spend many weary weeks in close attendance on her mother. The only alleviations from this wearisome duty being the constant visits of the love-sick youth whom she gradually grew to regard as her future husband.

Since the day she left Courtfield, which was at the end of the Christmas week, Constance had neither seen nor heard directly from her cousin.

She was not, however, kept in ignorance of the way matters were going with the Desmonds.

Lady Sinclair, although she detested letter writing as a rule, had never failed to send a lengthy epistle now and then to Miss Marlowe down at the dismal and deserted Limes.

Lady Sinclair would have taken more vigorous methods than this to cheer and solace her friend, but fate had decreed that she should go abroad with her husband, who showed alarming symptoms of acute bronchitis, and to whom the English winter was declared almost fatal.

Though she was so far away as Madeira, however, Lady Sinclair was quite au courant with the events of the day, and she gave Constance all the news that came to her, knowing it would be well received and appreciated.

No one except Constance and Philip Desmond knew exactly why she had found it so necessary to depart from Courtfield so hurriedly.

Many a time when she was quite alone, Constance Marlowe winced and grew very white as she recalled a certain short interview in the library at Courtfield, in which Philip Desmond informed her that she must prepare to leave his house as soon as possible, and that from that day forward he would not permit her to hold any communication whatsoever with her cousin, his wife.

"I don't think it will be necessary for me to enlighten you as to why this must be, but in case you should require the knowledge, I had better inform you that through Captain Montgomery I have been made acquainted with the real and true affection you hold for my wife, and of your womanly intentions towards her and her future," Philip had said. Constance had grown very pale and had trembled a little.

"Maurice Montgomery is a cur! and you—you are a fool!" she had cried with sudden passion. "Thank Heaven you will reap the reward of your folly, if you have not already done so. Send me out of your house, and your life—Philip Desmond, but you cannot shut my lips; and when I tell the story of your wife's infatuation for—"

Philip had looked her straight in the eyes. "I do not think you will say very much," he had answered quite calmly, and very coldly. "Remember you are in my power, and," he had paused for an instant, "where my wife's honour is concerned, you will not find me a tolerant person, I assure you."

So Constance had gone without seeking an interview with Kit, who was in bad ill—a severe cold, the village doctor declared, and so it was circulated.

The girl expressed neither sorrow nor surprise when she heard Constance was gone.

Sybil Montgomery was a little puzzled and a good deal concerned about Kit, and she determined to take upon herself to speak to Philip about his wife.

She stayed on at Courtfield after all the rest had gone. Maurice had left the day after the servants' ball, and appeared to have a great deal of military business to attend to, since he could not come down to see Sybil.

On the very day that Mrs. Montgomery intended to speak to Sir Philip about Kit, she was prevented. A telegram from her husband summoned her to town, and she journeyed thither as hurriedly as possible.

The result of the telegram was to plunge

poor Sybil Montgomery into the charge of Mr. Maurice had received orders from the War Office to hold himself in readiness to start immediately for an Indian frontier, where of late there had been sundry small outbreaks, which required firm and martial manipulation.

The news of Maurice's Montgomery's departure came absolutely unexpected to Philip. Since the night they had stood together in the old library, not a word or sign had passed between the two men.

They had parted in bitterness—a bitterness of conscious wrong on the young man's part, of suffering too deep for words on the elder.

For perhaps the only time in his life Maurice Montgomery had been true to his better nature. In plain, straightforward words he had put the story before Philip, he had not spared himself—his voice had been full of reverence as he dwelt on Kit's conduct.

"There has been wrong, shameful wrong," he had said, in a low voice, that was full of contrition, "but the wrong is mine, mine utterly, entirely mine—she—she is as pure as the child she was—as the child she is."

Philip had made no answer at first, and then he had spoken.

"As to my wife's conduct and character I am the best judge—as to you—you are a traitor and a coward; Maurice Montgomery. Go—out of my life—I never wish to touch your hand or see your face again. You are not worthy a place in an honest man's regard or remembrance."

Maurice had obeyed him silently, and with a certain dignity which even the man he had tried so deeply to wrong could not withhold from him, and the days had gone, and save from Sybil's lips the young man's name was never mentioned.

A few days before he sailed, leaving his young wife white and stricken at the thought of the horrible separation (and the state of Sybil's health would not permit of her accompanying him) Maurice wrote to Philip Desmond.

"I am leaving England in a few hours, for aught I know I may never return. I have wronged you deeply, but before the grim shadow of a separation which may mean death—I dare to approach you. Let me grasp your hand once more before I go, Philip. The hand of the friend who has been so much more than a friend, and in Heaven's name let me beseech you not to let the thought of me rest on your happiness for ever. She is a spirit of goodness and purity—she loves you with her whole heart and soul—do not turn from her, Desmond, do not embitter her young life, and ruin your future. As a man to a man I beseech you give me the inimitable joy of feeling that when I sail away I shall leave behind me a renewed bond of absolute peace and happiness between your wife and yourself."

"I do not deserve any good thing at your hands, yet, I who know you so well, know your great true heart and noble soul, feel that you will not refuse me in this. I leave Sybil to your care. Heaven forgive me, I have brought sorrow into her young life—but still it is not as bad as it would have been."

"Now she can still love me, and cling to me though we are far apart. I pray she may never know the truth. I pray I may be made more worthy of her, and more fit to touch the hand of a man who has been from first to last my best friend."

"MAURICE MONTGOMERY."

Philip Desmond was not at Courtfield when this letter came from Maurice. He was in London plunged into the business of his election, striving with might and main to let his and other outside matters fill his mind, and crowd out the vision of the lovely, wan young face that looked at him as beseechingly each day in the old-fashioned bedroom at Courtfield, looked with yearning hungry eyes, but whose



[KIT FLUNG HERSELF ON THE GROUND BESIDE PHILIP, AND CLUNG TO HIM WITH HER YOUNG ARMS.]

lips never spoke the words that were eating out her heart.

It had been an awful time to Philip since the night when he had answered Chris' eager call, and had carried the slender, unconscious form up the broad staircase to the room of quaint corners and dark shadows where she had been afterwards so ill. Philip Desmond had gone through an eternity of suffering. He lost his newly-found youth and buoyancy, the silver lines increased in his dark hair, there was a perpetual tired look in his eyes, a strained expression round his mouth.

If these signs were noticed they were at once attributed to anxiety over Kit's illness, no one save Chris Hornen knew what they really meant. The boy was himself in great trouble. This shadow that had fallen on Kit's happiness enveloped him about.

"Oh! if I could only set it right—if I could only do something—but there is nothing, in time perhaps he may see things differently, but then it may be too late—for I know her—I know Kit—each day that goes by like this, goes nearer to breaking her heart. I don't understand what he feels. Surely he must know she loves him with all her soul—and yet—"

But that was the one sorrowful mistake of Philip Desmond's mind. He had repented instantly of his roughness to her. Tears had blinded his eyes as he had lain her on the bed that night, and had gazed at the pathetic silence of her white loveliness.

By every means in his power he tried to let her understand his anger was gone. There was nothing but tenderness remaining, yet with all this, through all this, there was one thought, one memory.

"She gives him gratitude and duty, she gave him love. Her love is not for me. It has all been one big mistake. It was beautiful at first, now it is sorrowful. Poor child! poor little child! and I hurt her the other night. I said rough, harsh things to her, and they were not true. I do believe in her. I do

believe she would do all in the world to save me pain; but she does this from gratitude, from affection, not from love. She cannot give me love," and then he would grow a little cynical. "Constance Marlowe is only too right, I am a fool and I am reaping the reward of my folly. How can I expect the impossible! How can I, Philip Desmond, a middle-aged, grey-haired man, look to have the love of a beautiful young creature like Kit. It is absurd, it is absurd. I am a fool!"

This was the burden of thoughts, and in a vague way it touched Kit's comprehension.

Outwardly there was no difference between them. Every morning Philip came to her bedside, and bending his head kissed her forehead gently.

He was concerned by her illness, but he knew there was no danger, and that the fever that burned in her hands came from the trouble in her heart.

In a little time she would grow better, she was so young, and with the young time is a great physician.

He sat in her room and chatted with Sybil and read his papers; but to Kit it was one long agony when he was there.

"He is kind," she said to herself, "he is good. He regrets his hard words; but he does not believe me. Oh, Philip! Philip! what shall I do to let you know how much I love you!"

Then came Sybil's hasty departure, and the news of Maurice's term of foreign service. Kit learnt the latter in a few agonised words from Sybil.

She was up, sitting in a chair by the fire, and as she read the suffering that rang out so clearly in Sybil's note tears started to her eyes, and she covered her face with her two hands.

Philip had come to the door unperceived by her, and stood for a moment watching her. Her silent grief gave him horrible pain.

"She will conquer it, but she will suffer. Poor child! my poor little Kit! how brave she

is. I, who know what the torture of love is should pity her now. This news of his sudden departure is more than she can bear!"

He withdrew softly, and went down to the library.

Chris was there reading.

Philip stood in front of the fire for a few moments in deep thought. When he spoke he had taken a determination.

"Chris," he said, looking at the big, ungainly figure gently, "I want you to let me have a letter daily telling me how my wife progresses. I am obliged to go up to town about this election. There is no danger, but should she have the smallest need of me you will telegraph at once. I know I can trust you, Chris, to do all that is necessary."

"You can trust me," Chris answered, and then he was silent a moment. "Have you told Kit you are going, Sir Philip?" he asked, in a hurried way.

Philip shook his head, and was silent in his turn.

Chris grew very red in the face, and fidgeted on his big feet.

"Sir Philip," he began, then he hesitated, and then he began again. "Sir Philip, is—my—then the boyishness in him broke forth, "Oh! must you go? Must you leave her now, Sir Philip?"

The man looked at him with eyes that were not quite clear, and his lips trembled a little. He did not answer immediately, but when he spoke his voice was steady and clear.

"Yes, Chris," he said, quietly, "I must go! I must go!"

(To be continued.)

THAT a fall, especially on entering a new place, is an unlucky omen is a widely spread superstition; but, according to Camben, the ancient Irish believed that its evil might be averted "by turning round three times," and then "digging out a sod of the turf with a sword or knife."



["GO BACK TO THE HOUSE, SIR!" COLONEL WARDALE SAID, STERNLY, TO RODWELL.]

NOVELLETTE.]

MY HUSBAND'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

EVER since I could understand anything at all, I knew that as soon as I reached years of discretion, I had to earn my own bread, and and fight my own way in the world.

I was an orphan both my father and mother dying when I was too young to realise my loss, and to this day, they are but misty memories to me. They had never been rich; I think they must have been utterly alone in the world, because I never heard that I had any relatives beside them.

My father was a doctor, with a large but poor practice, and as I grew older, I used to wonder how he had contrived to save enough to educate and clothe me until my eighteenth year, and still leave a balance of one hundred pounds to my account at the local bank, which was not to be touched unless in the event of a rainy day.

Miss Harrison, my kind principal, had been my mother's instructress before she was mine, and for her sake, was doubly kind and tender to me.

Ours was not a grand school, and it was conducted on old-fashioned principles. French and music were thoroughly taught, but we knew nothing of Algebra and Euclid; we were blissfully ignorant of Greek and Latin. For the rest, we practised deportment, twice weekly attended, a dancing class, and had a fair smattering of the various subjects, which are supposed to make up the sum total of a young lady's education.

The house was large and roomy, and as Miss Harrison refused ever to receive more than twenty boarders, we made a large and comfortable family.

There was an immense, old-fashioned garden surrounding the school, walled in by a

grim looking barrier of flints and mortar. The interior was lovely, and Miss Harrison, having an intense appreciation of outdoor life (she was country-bred), and believing fully that work and play can be well combined, gave to each boarder as she came, a little plot of ground to cultivate and plant out, according to the dictates of her fancy. She used to say, that she judged our characters by the state of our gardens, and the flowers they yielded.

It was my eighteenth birthday, and all the girls had conspired with Miss Harrison, to make me some pretty and useful gift, because this was the last time I should form one of the festal parties at Regent House. It was known that I was going away; Miss Harrison was in treaty for a situation for me, but until all was settled, I was to know nothing, "because dear Diana," she said, affectionately, "suspense is so trying, especially to the young."

How well I remember that morning, even now. It was July, and all the previous night the rain had fallen in torrents, for we had had a long spell of dry weather, and as we went to our rooms, we had said ruefully, that we should have no picnic to-morrow. But when morning broke, I, who had slept but little, because of my excitement, rose, and creeping to the window, drew back the curtains.

A grey mist veiled all the land, and a strong spirit of discontent possessed me; my last birthday with the girls—probably my last day in the dear old place, which had, indeed, been a home to me—and to be wet! And then as I looked, there came just a little lifting of the mist, a ray of soft light shot through it, and glimmered like a string of opals, red and azure, and delicate primrose—gradually it broadened and brightened—then the sun sprang up in all its splendour, clouds and mists vanishing like magic, and there, before me, lay stretched the green and lovely world, and every blade of grass, every leaf

and blossom bowed beneath its weight of glistening raindrops.

I drew a deep breath.

"It is going to be fine after all," I said, joyously, and went back to bed, to sleep as only a healthy girl can when her mind is at rest.

At half past seven we all filed into the breakfast-room, and there on an otherwise unoccupied table stood a large, handsomely mounted trunk, the girls' gift, filled with all those little accessories to a young girl's toilet which she so prizes—these were of Miss Harrison's giving—and when I tried to thank them all, my voice so broke, and my eyes so filled with tears, that I am quite afraid we all wept a little together, and I know that breakfast was a very lugubrious affair. But afterwards we all brightened considerably, so that when we started for our picnic in two covered wagonettes, we were a very lively party. It seems to me, looking back, that on that day I said farewell to my careless thoughtless girlhood. I know that I never felt quite the same afterwards. But we had a very enjoyable time, and all returned to Regent House thoroughly contented with ourselves and the world, and as thoroughly tired. I even felt somewhat vexed when, as I was filing out with the others, Miss Harrison said,—

"Diana, just one moment, if you please, I have something of importance to communicate to you," and she glanced significantly at an open letter in her hand. I paused just in the open door way. "You know, dear child, that the time has come for you to go out into the world, and I think you know that if I could, I would keep you with me as under governess. But mademoiselle has been with me so long, it would break her heart to go, and Miss Bowtell's deafness is sorely against her, so for weeks, Diana, I have been anxiously looking for an opening for you."

"Yes," I articulated, as she paused as though expecting some reply.

At last I think I have found it. This letter

is from Colonel Dauntan Wardale, in answer to an application I made on your behalf. He requires a young lady who will be part governess, part companion to his only and motherless daughter, a girl of sixteen, who, he admits, is very much spoiled. The terms he offers, are especially generous, and I do not hesitate to say, accept the post. You will never get so good a chance again. In most cases your youth would be against you. Here it stands in good stead. What shall I say for you, Diana?"

I was shaken with the thought of leaving her and all of the girls, and I only answered, weakly,—

"Must I go? Do you really think I can fill the post decently?"

"Poor child, there is no alternative for you, but remember that Regent House is open to you now and always. If you cannot be happy at Forest Gate, return at once to me. You will always be sure of a welcome. And now is it to be you or no? I have to telegraph your reply to the Colonel, because if you go it must be to-morrow."

"Yes," I said, bursting into sobs, "there is nothing else left for me to do," and then I ran away to tell the girls of the great calamity which had befallen me, and we wept together like so many nineteenth century Niobes, much to the detriment of our looks the following morning, and I posed luxuriously as a martyr, and although I had indeed no intention of doing so, drew so upon my future imaginary sorrows, that my companions howled in concert dolorously.

That awful next day! I had bidden them all good-bye—I had cried to my heart's content. I had secretly stigmatised Colonel Wardale as "a horrid wretch" and his daughter as "a conceited little idiot," and I travelled sulkily down from Horsewall to Forest Gate, turning deaf ears, and unseeing eyes to the blandishments of my fellow passengers. At last, pale, and heavily-lidded, I reached my journey's end, and being duly conveyed to Wardale Court, was at once confronted by a tall girl, half child, half woman. She had flaxen hair flowing to her waist, blue eyes, and her pretty face was expressive, half of defiance, half of curiosity.

"So you are Miss Hill?" she said, extending her hand. "You are not what I expected you would be!"

"I am sorry that you are disappointed, Miss Wardale," I began, frigidly, when she broke into a gay laugh.

"You have no need to be," she said, dimpling all over. "I thought papa had fulfilled his oft-repeated threat, and given me a dowdy martinet for a governess companion, and to find you are scarcely older than myself, is sweeter than honey in the honeycomb to me. You must be awfully tired. Come in and rest. Jimson shall get the wine, and I will introduce you to my cousin, Rodwell Kearney. Papa is not at home; but you shall see him in the evening;" and, impatiently dragging me forward, she came to a standstill before an open French window.

"Come here, Rodwell," she cried, "I want you to know Miss Hill. You and I were all wrong. She isn't dowdy, or old, or ugly, or anything that we pictured her;" and then whilst I wished myself well away, a tall, fair young fellow came languidly out.

"Don't notice Lillias?" he said, with a slow smile, which lit up all his handsome face. "She is a child, and you know that only two classes of human beings always speak the truth. Miss Hill, I am glad to welcome you to Forest Gate. In the absence of my uncle, I must be his spokesman. No one ever trusts to Miss Wardale for civility."

Miss Wardale, tossed all her flaxen tresses contemptuously.

"Imitation may be the sincerest flattery," she said, scoffingly; "but you are miles and miles behind papa when you try to do the honours of the house. Why aren't you natural?"

I looked from one to the other in amazement, and seeing this, Mr. Kearney laughed.

"We are quite shocking you, Miss Hill; but really our little contests are harmless, we're awfully fond of each other, aren't we, Lil?"

"I hate you," she retorted, with such genuine passion, that I was more than ever startled, especially as her face had grown quite white, but the next moment she was laughing again. "Rod, I expect great fun from Miss Hill; she excels everything as serious. And now my guide, philosopher and friend, let me take you to your rooms, and Jimson shall serve us refreshments there." So with a careless nod to her cousin, she led the way upstairs to a couple of handsomely furnished rooms, set apart entirely for my use.

Here, with her two hands resting upon my shoulders, she twisted me slowly round, until we confronted each other. Then she said slowly and calmly,—

"I like your face; you aren't pretty, you know, but you have a sweet mouth, and your eyes are soft and nice; I think we shall be good friends. But first, you must call me Lillias, and as I don't like 'Miss Hill,' I shall find some nice diminutive for you, unless I approve your Christian name. What is it? Rodwell and I have run through all D's we can remember, Dora, Deborah, Drusilla, Dordas, Daisy."

"It is none of those; I am plain Diana Hill."

"Diana! we forgot that—I like it. Was it not Diana who came and kissed that poor, silly, Endymion, who could not be content with an earthly love, even though she might be as pretty as—as I am?" she concluded, with a child's artless vanity.

Then with her own hands, she administered to my wants, laughing and chatting gaily all the while, assuring me that she never had studied in any but a desultory fashion, and never intended to do so, because Aunt Kearney who kept a house, and had been a great beauty once, said that a woman had only to be pretty and bright, and men would ask no more of her—which remark set me thinking that Aunt Kearney was scarcely a fit person to have the guidance of so volatile a young lady as Miss Lillias Wardale.

In the evening I made the Colonel's acquaintance, and felt dwarfed beside his magnificent proportions.

He was a handsome man, but his stern looks awed me, and I felt so unmeasurably insignificant beside him. Have I told you that I am a very small woman! but he treated me with the kindest courtesy; and despite his grave looks, I found myself wondering how so young a man could be father to a girl of Miss Wardale's age.

She guessed this; for when she followed me to my room that night, she said,—

"How surprised you were when papa walked in. A great many people fancy at first sight that he is my brother, he is so young looking—but he and mamma were mere babies when they married—he, nineteen, and she seventeen, so that now he is only thirty-six. Mamma had not a happy home, and papa, seeing this, married her and took her away from it. He was very fond of her of course, but I do not think he loved her as I know he could love. She died when I was a few months old, and aunt Kearney and Rodwell came to live with us—do you like Aunt Kearney?"

"I cannot say; you forgot I was an utter stranger to her until to-day."

"That is a nice diplomatic answer!" retorted Lillias, "but it does not please me; I always know from the moment of meeting whether I like a person or not. Now I like my aunt, she never opposes me in anything."

"That is hardly judicious," I said, dryly.

"I don't care a fig whether it is judicious or not; it is pleasant."

"Now, but in the long run? You surely

don't expect, Lillias, that your will is never to be crossed, or your pleasure thwarted?"

She shrugged her shoulders carelessly.

"Don't preach; St. Paul says only the men should do that—at least I think it was St. Paul—but there, if you won't award auntie her due, you will acknowledge Rodwell is all that is handsome and nice."

"I acknowledge he is handsome, but I am as yet no judge of his niceness," I said, laughing, "pray where is Pere Kearney; or is he defunct?"

"Defunct, years and years ago. He was mamma's brother, and a dreadful lot, and never speaks of him, neither does Rodwell—he did something. I don't know what, but it was something shameful, and he had to run away. He went to America, and joined the Fenians there—and he was killed by an explosion of dynamite, which, considering all things, was a blessing to his family," with which extremely callous speech, she rose from her seat on the rug, kissed me in friendly fashion and went away.

The next morning, I tried to prevail on her to take up her long neglected studies; but she laughed in my face, and ran off to join Mr. Kearney in a long ramble.

Matters went on very much in this fashion for three or four days, and I began to be really distressed, whilst I could see Mrs. Kearney watched my futile efforts with evident pleasure, so I determined to appeal to Lillias Wardale's better nature. I met her on the stairs on the fifth morning of my stay at Wardale Court, and resolutely barring her way, said,—

"Lillias, when are you coming to the schoolroom?"

"Not ever, you conscientious mentor. It is far nicer to rove about with Rodwell, why don't you join us?"

"Because I am not forgetful of my duty. It distresses me to feel I am taking a wage I do not earn. I must appeal to the Colonel."

"There is no need for that," said a deep voice behind us; and we started to find the Colonel there.

"You will spend two hours each morning in the schoolroom, Lillias," and without another word he passed on.

"You are a horrid wretch, and I hate you!" cried the girl, as she flew to tell Rodwell.

CHAPTER II.

SPOILED child as she was Lillias dared not disobey the Colonel's expressed orders; so from that day, we studied each morning from ten until twelve, the Colonel occasionally looking in upon us.

At first, our privacy was sadly interrupted by Rodwell's continued invasions, which Lillias openly encouraged, until the Colonel, discovering how matters stood, spoke quite sharply to me on the subject.

"It is not Diana's fault," Lillias broke in, "she has forbidden him to come repeatedly, but I have rather at defiance."

"Why did you not tell me this, Miss Hill?" he asked sharply. "I will speak to my nephew on the subject. Of course, if you are pleased to allow him to share your walks, I can have no possible objection; but I will not allow him the run of the schoolroom," and then he left as abruptly as he came.

"I don't know how it is," Lillias said, resting her chin in her hollowed palm; "but papa who is just to all others, is always unjust to Rodwell. He is generous to him with regard to money matters you know; but he thinks Rodwell idle and frivolous—just as though he expects a young man to be as staid as himself."

"What is Mr. Kearney's profession?" I asked, more for the sake of making some reply than because I wished to know.

"Rodwell's?" Oh, he hasn't got one; papa suggested he should study law, but Rodwell's taste does not lie that way. Then he got him

a stool in some big office, but the confinement injured his health, and Auntie and I got alarmed about him—papa only laughed—now he is looking out for something under government.

"I see," I said, drily, "a place that is a mere sinecure, but which brings in a good income. I should say that would exactly suit Mr. Kearney."

She passed by my words without comment.

"Rodwell wished to enter the army, but papa negatived that proposal. He said it would be his ruin, although why it should ruin him and not papa I cannot think—and, regretfully, he would have made such a splendid soldier."

"Don't you think," I questioned, "you rather exalt your father at your father's expense? But assured he understands your cousin's nature better than you do."

In a moment her face flashed crimson, and her blue eyes flashed angrily upon me.

"I believe you are in league with papa to prejudice me against him; he is the best and noblest fellow under the sun. He has never given me an unkind word, and is always willing to wait on my pleasure. Then see how good he is to his mother—oh! how horrid it must be for him to be so poor! I wish that my fortune were my own to do with as I liked—I should gladly halve it with him today."

She was so evidently in earnest, that I felt sorry I had spoken as I did, and yet perhaps it was best her eyes should be opened to the glaring defects in her cousin's character. It hurt me to think that he to whom the Colonel was so good, should be so careless of his goodness; and what man of spirit would be content to be a pensioner on his uncle's bounty. I saw, too, that Mrs. Kearney threw the cousins together as much as lay in her power, that her whole aim and intention was to compass a marriage between her son and Lillias, so making his position and her own secure at Wardale Court. She was constantly singing his praises to the girl, who indeed, listened greedily, believing all the wonderful stories of his wonderful childhood with most perfect belief. He was her hero—I feared that in time, if it were not so now, she would grow to love him, and he was not the sort of man that a wilful girl should have for a husband. He was not bad, only weak and indolent, but without disliking him I despised him, because, despite all his plausible ways, he was utterly selfish; the world was made for his especial pleasure and enjoyment.

It was on the evening of the very day, on which I spoke to Lillias about him, that I wandered through the Wardale grounds, into a little sheltered nook beyond, where a shallow stream crawled its tardy way, being spanned by a bridge of most primitive fashion, it consisted of one wide plank, and a handrail. Upon the latter I leaned, looking down into the darkening waters, and thinking idly of this and that. I did not even turn my head when I heard quick steps approaching. This was a favourite walk with the natives of Forest Gate, but I was startled, when a voice I knew, said—

"Hail, Diana! goddess of the Ephesians!" and with a sudden sense of anger I confronted Rodwell.

He ought to have seen I was seriously angry, but I suppose he did not, for he disposed himself in a very easy attitude, beside me, and looking fully into my flushed face, said—

"Do you often come here at evening? By Jove! little Di, how your roses bloom, and how bright those pretty eyes of yours have grown."

I drew myself to my full height, four feet eleven.

"Mr. Kearney, your remarks are in very ill taste. If you will allow me to pass, I will go home."

"Oh, nonsense!" he retorted, with an incredulity, which made me long to strike him, though really I am not pugnacious, "girls always profess to dislike compliments, even

whilst they are hungry for them, "Diana, why cannot we make this beastly hole pleasant for each other? If only you would let me share your walks *sub rosa* you know, and be just a bit kind to a fellow, things would not be half so bad, and Lillias, the jealous little monkey, would be blissfully ignorant."

"You mean," I said so quietly, that he ought to have known I was getting dangerous, "you mean, Mr. Kearney, that you think a flirtation between us would waste away a few idle hours?"

"What a very clever little woman it is!" and then he put his arm about my waist, and tried to kiss me.

I felt as though I could kill him—I did not know until then what a shocking temper I possessed. With one quick movement I wrested myself from him, and I struck him fiercely across the smiling mouth; then, as he fell back a little with a muttered word, I thought I must have died with shame, for there, looking at us, with cold, stern eyes, was Colonel Wardale.

"You little vixen," cried Rodwell, laughing shortly, "I swear you shall pay toll for that blow;" and then, before he could say more, his uncle was beside him, and had twisted him out of the way.

"Go back to the house, sir!" he said, sternly. "I will speak to you later on. Miss Hill, allow me to take you home."

I stood quite still, afraid to look into his accusing face, and Rodwell, who was only too glad to escape, went by a round about path to the Court. Then the Colonel offered his arm, which I refused to take.

"Very well," he said, frigidly; "but you will not forbid me to walk beside you," and, together, we left the bridge, and only my pride prevented me bursting into tears.

It was hateful to be so misjudged, and I had grown to value his opinion almost without knowing it. I wished then I had never come to the Court, for things were daily growing more unpleasant for me.

Mrs. Kearney, watched my every action, the Colonel treated me frigidly, Rodwell, with a familiarity, which was fast converting my negative feeling towards him into honest contempt, and even Lillias was changed, being daily more capricious and occasionally unkind.

We had almost reached the house when Colonel Wardale said—

"Miss Hill, you are very young, and I believe quite friendless. Will you listen to a word of advice from a man who knows the world and its ways. You were angry with my nephew to-night because he sought a greater privilege than you intended granting. Why are you girls so foolish! A man like Rodwell Kearney values a woman only in proportion to her wealth, or the difficulty he has in winning her. Why do you cheapen yourself by a vulgar flirtation? Or is it that you love him and are not sure of his faith?" He stopped in the middle of the path, and looked down at me almost pitifully, I thought, "Is it that, Miss Hill? Answer me truly, for not even my own flesh and blood shall slide with any woman under my own roof."

"You mistake," I began, faintly, "I have never flirted with Mr. Kearney. It was quite by accident that he found me on the bridge. Oh! why do you think so poorly of me? Colonel Wardale, if you do not trust me, I will go away."

"Rodwell is young and handsome," he began, meditatively.

"But," I broke in, impatiently,—

"I wish to hear no more on the subject; I am tired of it. Please to let me go, and if you believe me as imprudent in my conduct as you appear to, it is better for Miss Wardale I should leave Forest Gate at once."

"Diana!"

That was all he said, but the tone of his voice went to my heart. I covered my face with my hands, and waited for him to speak again, and after what appeared like a century to me, he said,—

"Forgive me, I am harsh and suspicious. I have had much to suffer, and have grown distrustful; but you will try to think that I am really your friend, and if Mr. Kearney annoys you again, please oblige me at once," and with that he left me, and when he met me the next morning, he showed, neither by look nor word that he remembered that interview.

I know that Rodwell suffered a very bad quarter of an hour with his uncle, but apparently it had no lasting effect upon him, for he greeted me with the greatest sang froid; told me I was a little Xantippe, but he liked to see spirit in a woman, and for the rest he would not offend again.

That day I overheard a scrap of conversation certainly not intended for my ears. I was sitting sewing in the pleasant morning-room, when I caught the sound of voices outside.

"I tell you, Rodwell," it was Mrs. Kearney who spoke, "there is danger. A woman with my experience is not easily deceived. And I say, for all her quiet demure ways, the girl is as cunning as a fox, and intends inveigling your uncle into marriage—he is a young man yet you know—and if he married again, what becomes of your chance, or your cousin's either?"

I rose to go, when the sound of my own name, spoken with good-humoured contempt, arrested me.

"Pooh! you always meet trouble half way, mother. Diana Hill is a simple little prude; there is no harm in her. More than that, I'll bet you a cool thou, Wardale isn't the man to make an ass of himself for such an insignificant morsel of womanhood."

I stopped quite still, too full of anger and indignation to move.

"So I was the girl who was as cunning as a fox! I was trying to entrap my employer into a *mesalliance*."

The blood rushed from my heart to my brain, and I heard, as in a dream, that hateful woman say,—

"Be warned by me, strike while you can. Lillias is devoted to you, well make her your wife without delay; Dunstan will make good settlements."

"I don't believe he would ever give her to me," Rodwell said, moodily.

"There is such a thing as snatching the prize without so much as saying by your leave, and Lillias is quite subservient to your wishes."

Then the voices died out, and I heard slow steps crossing the path to the caplars: I am afraid I did not think much of Lillias or her probable fate in that moment.

I was outraged, wounded: How dare that woman imagine so vile a thing of me? How dare she give utterance to it?

And then gradually I came to know my own heart and cowered down in an anguish of shame, for I loved this man, my employer, the man who rarely spoke to me, who regarded me with grave, inscrutable eyes, and perhaps even yet had a lurking doubt of my propriety of conduct with regard to his nephew.

I felt then I must go away; I could not meet him. I never should be at ease in his presence again, and if he should read my secret the shame of it would kill me.

But then other thoughts came. I would not run away because of a malicious woman's tongue; rather I would stay to thwart her plans, for I felt if ever Lillias married Rodwell, her happiness would be irretrievably ruined.

I was profoundly wretched, but I do not think that any one guessed this, when I appeared at dinner. Only I was careful never to glance towards the Colonel, and when he addressed me, I returned none but monosyllabic answers.

"How sulky you are, Di!" exclaimed Miss Wardale as we entered the drawing-room together. "You look as gloomy as papa does when Rod or I have done something to displease him awfully. Come here, Rod, I want

you to sing this with me. Thank you, Diana, I will play my own accompaniment," and she struck the opening notes of Mendelssohn's duet, "I would that the love I bear thee."

Mr. Kearney had a pleasant tenor, and it blended well with the bell-like notes of the girl's voice.

He sat beside her, his yellow hair all but mingling with her flaxen waves and curls; and as he sang he looked into her eyes to emphasise the words he rendered. She understood, for the colour came and went in her face, and her voice was a little shaken.

It was at this moment, Colonel Wardale entered the room, and glancing at the young couple, came towards me. I saw that he was angry, such a heavy frown contracted his brow.

"Dunstan," purred Mrs. Kearney, "how delightful to see you in our midst!" for usually he spent his evenings alone in his study; and she drew back her skirts to make room for him beside her, but he disregarded her invitation, and dropping into a chair beside me, said in a low voice,—

"How often does that sort of thing take place?"

"I do not understand you," I stammered, knowing that Mrs. Kearney was watching me all the while irritated and confused me. "Please be more explicit."

"Follow the direction of my eyes and tell me what you see. Women are generally keener in these things than men."

I did as he bade me. Lillias was sitting with her idle fingers upon the keys, her face turned fully towards her cousin, her lips a little apart, her blue eyes glowing, as he sang,—

"My love on wings still unwearied shall hover o'er thy sleep."

Her own voice had died out. She was utterly unconscious of any presence but his, and when the last word was sung she gave a long drawn sigh, shivered a little, then coming back to the ordinary world, blushed, laughed a trifle hysterically, and rising cried,

"You here, papa? What does this miracle mean?"

He put an arm around her, and drawing her down beside him, kissed her gently.

"Is the old man an intruder then, my Lillias?" he asked.

"No, oh, no! Of course it is nice to have you come out of your shell."

But a sense of restraint hung over our little party for the remainder of the evening, and I was heartily grateful when the candles were brought in.

CHAPTER III.

As I came downstairs the next morning I met the Colonel.

"May I beg you to give me a few minutes alone?" he asked, and I, trembling a little with fear and a great deal from confusion, bowed an affirmative.

He led the way to the study, which until now I had never entered, and giving me a chair, said, abruptly,—

"You remember the question I asked you last night, Miss Hill? You would not answer me then. Perhaps you will do so now, or do you still cherish animosity against me for my plain speaking?"

"If you will tell me just exactly what you wish to know," I answered, "I will try to satisfy you," and I was painfully conscious of the awkwardness of my manner.

"Do you think that there is any understanding between Lillias and my nephew? She is so young that until quite recently I have never associated her in my mind with love or lovers. To me she has always been a mere child."

"She will be seventeen in a few months," I said, "and she is precocious; but I hope there is no danger before her. She is very fond of Mr. Kearney, and has been led to

believe him quite a hero; but then she is young, and has had no opportunity of contrasting him with other men."

He walked the length of the study and back again.

"Do you believe her fondness amounts to love?" he asked, distressfully.

"A young girl's first love is often very evanescent," I answered, diplomatically.

He sighed.

"Poor little girl! May it prove so in her case, for under no circumstances would I consent to a union between these two. It would only result in utter misery to Lillias. Perhaps I have been too lax in my authority and watchfulness. She was left motherless so young that I tried to atone for her loss by over-indulgence, and now I am afraid that even what small control I had over her is gone. It seems strange that I should come to you for help," he said, a faint smile lighting the gloom of his face. "You are but a child yourself, but I think I may trust you."

"I am sure that you may. Tell me what to do, and I will do it if possible."

"I want nothing but your advice. Counsel me how to act. Miss Hill, I assure you I would rather see Lillias dead than married to a Kearney. They are bad from root to branch, or if not bad, so weak that vice is easier to them than virtue; I learned long afterwards that he had clothed his young wife with virtues she did not possess so that her memory should be sacred to her child. I don't think Rodwell would be actively unkind to any creature; but neglect would kill my girl, and I say he shall not have her."

"Why," I asked, bluntly "If you so distrust your nephew do you allow him to remain on here? Why not discuss the matter of his removal with his mother?"

"I trust her less than him. On occasion she could be cruel; but your question is a natural one. Of course, they are my wife's relatives, and quite penniless. I could not cast them adrift, but I should feel safer if he were away."

"Then send him away. He is a man, let him earn his bread as becomes one."

The Colonel stood thoughtful a moment, then he said,—

"That is good advice. I will not only remember but act upon it; and it might be as well if we occupied the child's thoughts with other things. What do you say to a trip to Paris?"

"It would be very pleasant, and Lillias is very fond of gaiety."

"I will arrange matters then as quickly as possible. Thank you for your patience, Miss Hill, and remember I rely upon you for further help; and, here he smiled that grave smile of his I knew so well, try to regard me less as an ogre and more as a friend," then for the first time since we had met he offered me his hand.

Blushing and a little agitated I left the study only to come into collision with Mrs. Kearney, who had evidently been listening, and listening vainly, for we had spoken only in the lowest tones. Shooting a malevolent look at me she said,—

"In future, Miss Hill, when you have any communication to make to my brother you may entrust it to me; and I would be glad to find you a little more decorous in your conduct—the example you set Miss Wardle is distinctly bad."

Without a word I passed her by, although indeed, my heart was hot with anger, but I would not stoop to notice her vile insinuation, and throughout the whole of breakfast we exchanged no speech.

Later in the day, the Colonel broached the subject of our journey, and Mrs. Kearney declared herself delighted. It was years since she had been to Paris. She should re-live her youth again, and dear Lillias would be ravished with the brilliant, naughty place.

The Colonel allowed her to talk herself breathless, then he said,—

"You a little misunderstand my plans,

Eulalia. I propose taking only Lillias and Miss Hill, as our visit will not extend over a fortnight, and I shall be obliged if you will remain at home with Rodwell. I do not like to leave so large an establishment solely to the care of servants."

Mrs. Kearney's face was a study in its wrath and impotence, but when Lillias cried out,— "Oh if aunt and Rodwell are not going, neither do I care to go," she turned to her with a martyr's smile. "My dear, Miss Hill and your father will amply supply an old woman's place. I won't deny that I am disappointed, but your father knows best, and poor dependents—"

"I won't go," Lillias said, again with added determination. Her father laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"In all things essential," he said, quietly, "I expect obedience, my plans are laid. I do not think my little daughter will wish to thwart them;" but Lillias thrust aside that gentle hand, and went to her aunt.

"I shall hate to leave you all alone in this horrid place. I won't enjoy myself in the least, and Diana is such a stupid companion."

"Leave the room, Lillias," said the Colonel, sternly, "you are forgetting yourself, and one glance at his grave face, compelled her obedience. Then he turned to Rodwell. "I hope I have found employment for you at last," he said, "but I shall know certainly in a day or two, and will wire you, so that you may proceed at once to your berth."

"I think brother, you might have consulted us and not a stranger," remarked Mrs. Kearney. "I am deeply hurt that I should be thought incapable of caring for our dear girl's interests, but I am an old woman—"

He interrupted her quickly.

"No more of this, Eulalia. I have grave reasons for acting as I have done. Let us say no more on the subject."

She shot a swift glance at Rodwell, who was sulkily staring out of a window.

"My poor boy," she said, "we have outlived our welcome;" but the Colonel had left the room, and with a quick change of tone, she flashed upon me.

"It is to you," she said, fiercely, "that we owe this indignity. I told you Rodwell, that she was a snake in the grass, that you would regret not listening to my warning."

"Oh shut up!" he retorted, inelegantly.

"I hate to hear you pitch into an innocent girl in that fashion. You're savage I know, but don't vent your spite on the wrong party. This is only one of Wardale's cranks; I wonder what sort of berth he is so kindly working to obtain for me. Then to me—"

"There Miss Hill, don't take any notice of the old lady's words; disappointed people say things they never mean and hardly remember. I don't believe you have anything to do with this affair."

"Thank you," I answered, gravely; and effected my escape as quickly as I could. But we were a very lachrymose party for the next few days, and Mrs. Kearney had so undermined Lillias' faith in me, that she avoided me on every possible occasion.

By a clever contrivance on the part of the Colonel he succeeded in keeping Rodwell and Lillias apart until the very time of our departure. Telling his sister precisely the hour on which we should return, he added,—

"We shall be too much occupied with our pleasures to have any leisure to write, so I think all letters may be considered unnecessary. Come, Lillias, I am ready and waiting."

She had been crying a great deal, and was looking her very worst, every feature being blotched and burred by her angry tears. She kissed and clung about her aunt until the Colonel grew manifestly impatient, and bade her hurry over her farewell with Rodwell; there was only a handshake between them, and then we were hurried to the carriage, and driven away from the Court.

I am free to confess that poor Lillias was a

most wretched companion; she only left off crying when she was sea-sick, and then she moaned that she should die and papa would be content.

I am not going to say anything about our stay in Paris, except that, regarded as a pleasure excursion, it was an utter failure. The Colonel was in despair; his daughter would express neither interest nor pleasure in anything she saw or heard, but throughout preserved a sulky, taciturnity quite foreign to anything I had seen in her before.

I think we were all heartily glad when we were fairly on our return journey, and as we drew nearer Forest Gate, smiles began to break through the gloom of Miss Wardale's face, and she prattled as gaily as though she had not made her father's life a burden to him through those long dreary fourteen days. The colour came back to her cheeks, and her eyes brightened.

"How nice it is to be home once more," she cried, "after all, daddy dear, there is no place like it."

He sighed, but made no response; he was looking very weary and anxious, and there were cruel little lines of thought and pain upon his broad brow.

I was angry that Lillias should be so headless of these things. When we reached the Court, she sprang from the carriage, waiting for no assistance, and running into the hall, flung her arms about Mrs. Kearney, who had come out to meet us.

"Oh, how glad I am to be back again, auntie; it has all been so horrid, though, of course, papa meant it to be nice—and I was so awfully sick going and coming—stand back and let me look at you! Why, I vow you are younger and prettier than ever," and then she had drawn Mrs. Kearney into the dining room, whilst the Colonel and I followed unnoticed. But I saw the girl's eyes going searching about the apartment, and presently she said,—

"I almost hoped Rodwell would meet us; where is he, auntie? It is not like him to neglect me."

"My dear, Rodwell is not here. I thought your father had told you so much; poor boy, he was sorry to leave without a single good-bye; but you know he is not one to hesitate when duty calls him."

Lillias broke in sharply then.

"Papa, where is my cousin, Rodwell?"

"In town," answered her father, quietly. I have given him a last chance to prove himself a man; his berth, under government, is a very easy one, the salary two hundred a year which I will supplement with a like sum. Wish your cousin luck, and the energy to keep it when it comes."

I never saw anything more dreadful than the change on that girl's face, as she heard his words. She was white to the very lips, which were drawn so tightly back that they showed the small clenched teeth; her eyes were almost black with rage and pain. She stood quite still a moment, then she sprang to his side and shaking him by the arm, said hoarsely,—

"Why have you done this thing? Why have you deceived me, and driven him away? Answer me! answer me! wherever he is I will find him; I will show him that whoever changes I do not change, that I love him now and always," and that evil woman behind her, stood smiling triumphantly, as the Colonel with a very pale, stern face, said,—

"Listen, Lillias; it is for Rodwell's good that he should go. I shall not live for ever, and at my death he would be absolutely penniless. It would be cruel kindness to keep him here in indolence—he who must one day earn his bread by his own unaided efforts."

"Then divide the estate equally between us," she cried, "why should he be poor, whilst I am rich? And I did not think papa you would stoop to deceive me."

He took her hands in his; often and often in the days that followed, I think she must

have remembered the anguished look he turned upon her, as he said,—

"My daughter, I think I acted for the best, and you would give me no least chance of private speech while we were away, even had I wished it. Always it has been my endeavour, as Heaven is my witness, to make your life glad and bright, and I saw, poor little one, you were drifting away from happiness, and I prayed the way might be made plain to me to save you. Shall he, your cousin, be more to you, than I—your loving parent."

She snatched away her hands, he hardly seemed to heed the gesture of repulsion, as he went on,—

"Let us go back to the old life, the old ways child, and for any unjust words you have spoken, I forgive you as freely, as I hope you will forgive any undue severity on my part."

"I will forgive you," she said, slowly, "when you recall Rodwell, never until then," and she moved towards the door, "aunt you will come with me?"

"Stop," he cried, hoarsely as Mrs. Kearney moved to her side. "Miss Hill, will you oblige me by remaining with Lillias to-night—and child, oh, my child, Heaven forbid you should ever suffer as this night you have made me suffer."

She answered nothing, only with her head erect walked from the room, and I followed her slowly upstairs. In her open doorway she paused,—

"You can go," she said, hardly, "you are but a tool in my father's hands, and I refuse to associate with spies—do you hear me, go!" stamping her foot imperiously. But I was now so angry with her that I forgot any fears I might have had, as I boldly pushed my way in.

"I intend to obey my employer," I said, looking the door behind me.

"And the man you want to marry," she sneered, looking as though she would strike me.

I felt the colour rush into my face; but I would not yield an inch to this ungrateful, wayward girl.

"I know who has told you that shameful falsehood," I said, quite quietly, "and I am duly grateful. But, Miss Wardale, no matter how rarely you may not and speak to me I shall obey your father's commands."

In a paroxysm of pain and anger she flung herself, face downwards, on her bed, crying to Rodwell to return, moaning,—

"I love him! I love him!" until I was so disgusted with her lack of delicacy, that I spoke very sharply indeed.

"You are a shameless girl," I cried, "to proclaim your love for a man who has never cared to ask for it. Who is not worthy to breathe the same air as the father whose heart you would break because of him. Do you wish the whole household to hear your cries and know your wickedness? There is not one right thinking person, who knowing all the truth would not condemn and flout you utterly. Oh! shame, shame upon you, so to reward the love and care of long years. To give to your father the bitter cup poor old Lear's daughters gave him to drink. Heaven forgive me, it to-night I loathe you from my heart!"

She lifted herself on her elbow to look at me. I think she was a wee bit frightened at my unwonted ebullition. However that may be, she sullenly suffered me a little later to disrobe her, and I kept watch over her until she fell asleep when being worn out by the excitement of the day, I took up my position upon a couch, and soon slept as soundly as the wilful heiress of Wardale Court.

CHAPTER IV.

For a few days Lillias refused to leave her room or to see her father. Her sole entreaty

was that she might see her aunt; and when I told the Colonel this, he said,—

"What would you advise? I cannot endure this estrangement longer. I want my child back; and really I don't see what harm Eulalia can do her now. I will take care there is no correspondence between the young people. The letter-bag is always brought to me. Yes, I think we may admit Mrs. Kearney to her; and then he looked at me with such kind eyes my own grew moist. "I don't know what I should have done without you at this juncture," he said, gravely. "You have been my right hand, as you have long been the sunshine of the house. I know you have been made to endure many slights and hardships, though I have not spoken I have not been blind to these things, and I appeal to you by the generosity of your pure, strong heart, to bear life here a little longer, for my poor child's sake and mine!"

I dared not look at him then, if I had I know he must have guessed the truth; but I stammered out some incoherent reply which seemed to satisfy him, despite its incoherency, and then I went away about my duties.

Oh! if only I could serve him, minister to his happiness, hoping and seeking no reward, glad to spend myself for him and his, I should be blessed above all women.

And then my heart melted towards that wretched girl upstairs, who knew him so ill as to dishonour him by her suspicions, and wound him by her coldness.

During my absence Mrs. Kearney was with her, and it surprised me a little that Lillias came down to luncheon with her, pale it is true, but brighter than she had been for days.

She met her father's advances in a friendly spirit, and I could see how much his load was lightened, and rejoiced for his sake.

Only as the days wore by, and Lillias continued gay and apparently content, I began to grow suspicious. I felt sure that by some means she contrived to hear of Rodwell; but I did not know until much later that Mrs. Kearney, by ways best known to herself, regularly conveyed letters to and from Forest Gate; and as the Colonel was delighted with the improvement in Lillias, I would not so much as breathe my doubts to him.

So matters stood when her seventeenth birthday arrived, and Rodwell, who still held his clerkship, wrote begging permission to make his congratulations in person.

I could see Colonel Wardale was secretly opposed to his coming; but Lillias had been so pretty and bright of late, that he felt it would be ungracious to deny her so small a pleasure; and he added, with a smile at me,—

"I am inclined to think you spoke truly when you said a young girl's first love is often very evanescent."

So Rodwell came, and the cousins greeted each other with very suspicious calmness, and the Colonel looking intensely relieved, made much of his nephew, asking numerous questions about his duties, and his prospects, all of which were answered satisfactorily.

In the morning every one presented his or her gift to Lillias, all save Rodwell, who laughingly said,—

"She must bide a wee for his."

After breakfast he went out with his uncle, and when they returned I guessed at once that something unpleasant had arisen between them. The Colonel looked troubled, Rodwell sulky, and as they joined us I saw that both Mrs. Kearney and Lillias were ill at ease, and rose to go.

"Stay, Miss Hill, if you please," said my employer. "There is a matter in hand the nature of which is not unknown to you. Lillias, you once accused me of deceiving you. Is it true that you in your turn have deceived me; that against my wishes, and secretly you have been constantly corresponding with Rodwell Kearney? That it is with your consent he has to-day asked me for your hand?"

She was very white and a good deal afraid, I think, but her lover's presence gave her courage to say in a low voice,—

"Both these things are true."

"Come to me, child; think well what you are doing! Will you turn from a love, tried and proved from your birth until now, to one that may fail you; it, indeed is ever has been yours; when most you need? My child—not that."

She looked from him to her lover, had her eyes were full of tears. Then she halted a moment between the two—only a moment—Rodwell's whispered word "Lilias!" brought her to his side.

Half remorseful, half defiant, she lifted her head.

"My place is here, this is my choice," she said.

"Then Heaven help me and you," came her father's broken answer, and his head dropped low, until with a flash, all the fierce spirit within him broke from control, and he looked and spoke as I hope I may never hear him speak or see him look again.

"You have made your choice; blame none if sorrow comes of it. But I—who Heaven help me! am still your father, cannot see you drifting to destruction and not stretch out a hand to save you. You are my child, mine absolutely and entirely, until you are of age, and, until that day, I refuse to allow any communion between you and these people. If you marry that man, I will not leave you to starve, but he shall not enjoy the revenues of Wardale, or waste them in riotous living. Child! come to me! ah the yearning in his voice! let us forgive and forget together. Can we who have loved so long, so easily part?"

"My place is here," she said, again.

"Then be it so," he retorted, "but you had better be dead than marry a Kearney, they will kill all that is good in you, break your heart, drag you into the mire in which they delight to wallow."

"My mother was a Kearney," the girl said, coldly.

He started as though she had struck him, then bowing, muttered, "I thank you for that reminder. But not even for your mother's sake will I trust you, save under compulsion to a Kearney. Prove yourself a good and true man, this to Rodwell, you have four years in which to substantiate your claim to the title; and then—then, if it is Heaven's will, you should win my girl, I can do no more. In the meanwhile, I beg that you and your mother will make preparations for leaving the Court at once. You need not fear Eulalia "as Mrs. Kearney began to cry." I will still continue your allowance, on the understanding that you never molest me or mine again. Go to your room, Lilias, and do not leave it until I give you permission," and cowed by the change in her father, she turned to obey, only before she lifted up her face and kissed Rodwell, who, slipping his birthday gift, a betrothal ring upon her finger, said audibly, "Keep this in remembrance of me until the happy day when I may claim you for my very own."

And although Colonel Wardale frowned, he made no remonstrance.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Kearney and Rodwell departed ignominiously, and, as Lilias refused to admit me to her room, I wandered disconsolately about the house until I came to the library, which I supposed would be empty; but as my eyes rested upon a bowed figure, a proud head brought low, I turned to leave as noiselessly as I had entered, but in my hurry I upset a chair, and in a moment was detected. What a haggard face was lifted to mine, the tears rushed unbidden to my eyes as I looked upon it.

"I—I beg your pardon," I stammered, "I thought the library was deserted!"

"Do not go little Diana, stay with me and exorcise the demon possessing me," and as he stretched out his hand to me, I laid mine in it, "nobbling out, that I would gladly bear his burden if I could, for the sake of the child he loved so well."

"I do believe that you would," he said, gently, and gravely. "You are not given to say one thing and mean another, and now,

Diana, the question arises what shall we do with our poor, unhappy child. I have sometimes thought I should have been wiser to give her a mother long ago, but I shrank from marrying without love. My delay was solely for that reason, and now—" his voice faltered a little, "I would not ask any woman to share so unhappy a home as this must be, whilst divided against itself."

My heart sank within me, there was some one he loved then. But even in the midst of my pain, I felt I could endure to see that favoured one his wife, if only he were happy.

"Once or twice," he continued, "I have thought of sending Lilias away to some pleasant school, but I am quite certain she never would endure the restraint imposed, and she would have ample opportunities to correspond with Rodwell. In some way," sadly, "I have failed in my duty to her, or she would never so oppose my will, or so misjudge me."

"Wait awhile," I said, "I think there is nothing you can do. In time her natural affection will reassert itself, and she will be sorry for her offence against you, and ashamed of her wild infatuation."

"It may be so, but she has much of the Kearney nature, and is resolute to accomplish her own will and desire. Poor little woman! This is a dull house for her. I am afraid you have had nothing, but hard times since you came amongst us!"

I hastened to assure him it was not so, and then we talked a little of the future, when Lilias might decide her own fate, and though I said nothing that was comforting, the shadows were not now quite so deep in his eyes when I rose to go.

"You will not consider it necessary to avoid me on every possible occasion?" he asked, with his rare, grave smile.

"I am at your service always," I answered, and went away to my own room to think over his kind words and looks, and wonder what in the world I should do, when the time came for me to leave Forest Gate and him.

In a day or two Lilias was about again, and although subdued in manner, uttered no word of complaint. Presently the natural gaiety of her disposition once more asserted itself, and her manner towards her father grew tender and solicitous, but towards me she maintained a frigidity which hurt me sorely. Once I begged her to let me go away, as I had grown hateful to her. She turned sorrowfully upon me, with something about her mouth and in her eyes which made her look a moment like her father.

"I wish I could hate you," she said, in slow, low tones. "It would be easy to send you away then. But though I distrust you, I am sincerely fond of you, and I should miss you badly if you went away."

"And do you suppose?" I cried, hotly, "I am going to remain where I am an object of suspicion? I have not wronged or betrayed you. Tell me of what you suspect me. At least be just and give me leave to defend myself."

"Nothing you can say," she replied, wearily, "will change my belief."

"Then, I beg you to seek another companion. I shall tender my resignation to Colonel Wardale to-day. There is nothing else left me to do."

"But," she cried like the spoiled child she was, "I cannot spare you. It is impossible. There are a hundred and one things you do for me as no one else ever could."

"You will not find my place difficult to supply. To-morrow is quarter day. You will accept three months' notice from that date. It shall be formally tendered; no entreaties will not move me now; I have borne enough."

I am proud to say I maintained my composure until I reached my own room where I sobbed like the veriest baby, to remember that once away from Wardale Court I never should see its master again; but then his daughter's attitude towards me compelled my action. The next day I laid my written resignation upon his desk in the study, and stole away wretchedly

enough. An hour later, I was summoned to his presence.

"What does this mean?" he asked, harshly, pointing towards my poor little paper. "Why do you wish to go? and as I hesitated, Lilias appeared in the doorway. He turned to her quickly.

"Miss Hill intends leaving us," he said, in a bitter tone. "I suppose we have wearied her patience at last; but I hoped and believed in her we had found a good friend."

Still I was silent. Could I accuse this girl of cruelty to her own father? But Lilias was not without generosity.

"It is my fault," she said, crimsoning. "Yesterday I simply told her I distrusted her, and so she has resolved to go."

"You mean," he said; sternly, "you have grossly insulted her?"

"If you choose to put it so, yes," she answered defiantly; "but I did not speak without cause, she deceived me and betrayed my trust."

"Silence," he said; sternly, "I will not allow such words to be used to Miss Hill. She has borne with you with marvellous patience; and it does not benefit Mrs. Kearney that you should adopt her ideas."

An angry retort was on her lips, but I could not bear that he should be further wounded, and with a burst of tears, I cried,—

"Oh, pray, say no more. I will go to-day if you wish it. I cannot stay to be a bone of contention between you; you will be happier when I am gone."

"If I ask you to stay," said the Colonel, in a queer voice, "will you?"

"No," I answered, not daring to look at him; lest my resolution should fail; "I never should have undertaken a post for which I was palpably unfit."

He sighed as he said,—

"Perhaps you are wiser to go, but I am sincerely sorry that my daughter's conduct should have rendered it necessary. If I have any claim upon your friendship, I should be glad to think you would stay with us until I can find a suitable school for Lilias."

She started, seemed about to speak violently, then controlling herself, said,—

"I am to go to school then?"

"I see no help for it. Child! child! why will you drive me to extreme measures?"

And what more he said I do not know, for I turned and left them alone together, and it seemed to me my heart must break.

I wrote to Miss Harrison, begging her to receive me if possible as teacher. I did not care how small the salary, so that I might return to her and my old content.

She answered me by return of post, asking nothing of my reason for leaving Wardale Court, only regretting that I should find it necessary to relinquish such a handsome salary for the meagre one, fifteen pounds, all told, which she could give me.

Miss Bowtell had luckily come into a small legacy and would resign her post as music teacher at the same quarter. She (Miss Harrison) felt I was quite efficient to fill her place, and would be but too glad to welcome me again to Regent House.

When I communicated this intelligence to Colonel Wardale, he merely tugged visionarily at his monocle, and made no audible reply. Lilias, on the contrary, said loftily,—

"I hope you will find the change agreeable; and I daresay it will seem like being among your own to go back to school-life."

"And," said I, "I trust you will find 'school life' pleasant."

She only smiled.

Then as the weeks wore by, the increasing heat and the anxiety I had long suffered, the anguish of the coming parting with Dunstan Wardale, so told upon me that I fell ill. It was nothing serious; but inefficiently bad to keep me prisoner to my room, and to reduce my strength dreadfully.

Lilias was very kind to me then, but we did not draw nearer to each other. And afterwards I learned how always her aunt

and Rodwell had stood between us, making friendship an impossibility for us.

CHAPTER V.

It was towards the end of May when I was first allowed to go downstairs; and I was so very weak that the kindness shown me by all went far to unnerve me.

Lilias had placed a bouquet of choicest flowers in my favourite nook, and the Colonel drew my couch to the sunniest window saying, with a smile, I was essentially a daughter of summer, and even the servants seemed pleased to have me about again.

Lilias did not stay long with me, however. She seemed more restless than ever I had known her, and as the days wore by, her fitful moods were a constant source of surprise to me and anxiety to her father. She knew no medium, but was always either extravagantly gay or desperately depressed.

Her father had given her carte blanche with regard to her outfit for the very fashionable school she was to attend, and she certainly availed herself to the fullest of his generosity; choosing dainty confections, that certainly were scarcely suitable for school wear.

She gave herself up heart and soul to the milliners' and modistes who haunted the Court, so that we drifted further apart with each fleeting day.

On the second of June she sat down with a sigh of satisfaction, declaring that she now had everything in readiness for departure, but that before "immuring herself in school" she would like to spend a few days with a distant cousin residing on the borders of Kent.

To this Colonel Wardale made no objection. Indeed he seemed relieved at her suggestion.

"It will be a pleasant change for you, child," he said, "and the arrangement suits me admirably, as Bostock wants me to run over to Versailles with him to inspect a villa he thinks of purchasing. But it will be very lonely for you, Miss Hill. Have you any friend you would care to invite to the Court?"

I answered in the negative. I should be perfectly happy alone, and I felt I could not bear society just then.

So we bade the Colonel good-bye, he going by an earlier train than Lilias, who refused any escort; and as she kissed her father, she said—

"As you are not quite certain of your movements, it would be nonsense to write, and I am the wretchedest correspondent, as you know, and a fortnight will quickly pass."

"Very well," he answered, although I could see he was pained, "it shall be as you please. Good-bye, my darling daughter, and Heaven help us to a better understanding of each other."

Then he was gone, and a little later Lilias said—

"I wish I were worthier my father. I wish I loved him first and best of any; but my heart is hard and cold against him, and pray as I may, strive as I do, it will not respond to his kindness. Perhaps I am afraid of him; perhaps I am still sore that he can send me, his only child, into exile. There, I know by that contraction of your brows just what you are dying to say; but I won't give you the chance. I don't mean to quarrel any more with you, because the parting between us is so near, and although I cannot trust you I have honestly liked you!"

Quite at the last she kissed me.

"You go on the twenty-fourth," she said, "and as it is quite probable I shall prolong my stay, I will wish you good-bye in earnest now. Good-bye, Diana, and I hope you will be happy!"

As she stepped into the carriage she turned her bright and smiling face towards me. Her eyes were radiant, and her cheeks flushed with

excitement, and there was nothing to tell me that never any more should I see her, her old gay self, no voice to cry to me, "Do not let her go." She does not guess what lies before her!

I went back to my book, and although the following days were of vegetation length, they were not unhappy; and I found a great deal to do in assisting the kindly housekeeper in her multitudinous duties.

On the nineteenth Colonel Wardale returned, and was surprised to find that Lilias was still absent.

"I will write her to-morrow," he said, "recalling her. I would like to have my little girl at home for a few days before she leaves for school. Although I know that her going must be for her good, I cannot but feel the parting and the necessity for it keenly."

We dined together that night, both of us feeling somewhat awkward; but when I rose from the table, he said—

"May I come up to-night, Miss Hill, or would you prefer being alone? If so pray do not hesitate to say so; but I am feeling desperately solitary."

"Come," I said, as he paused, "I will try to amuse you if I can."

So we went up together, and I played some new nocturnes and sonatas until the lights were brought in, and with the lights a telegram for the Colonel.

He rose to receive it, and the servant being gone, leisurely opened the orange envelope. Then he gave one great and bitter cry, which forced me to his side, and he stood with the message crushed hard in his hand, his face drawn and blanched, his eyes gleaming wildly from beneath his frowning brow.

Then suddenly he dropped, inert, half-breathless into a chair, and I ventured to say—

"Oh! I hope you have no bad news!"

With a start he remembered my presence.

"Read it!" he said, hoarsely, "read it!" and thrust the telegram into my hand. "Oh, Heaven! my child! my child! I had rather have known you dead!"

And I read—

"From Kearney to Wardale."

"L and I married this morning; off to Spain; letter follow this!"

I stood silent. I had not a word of comfort to utter. I dared not so much as trust my voice to speak, knowing well I should have broken ignominiously into sobs. With a half-impatient gesture he turned to me.

"Have you nothing to say? Help me to curse them root and branch; these Kearneys who all along have cursed my life, who have weaned my daughter's love from me, have taught her their guileful ways, have snatched her from her sheltered home, to break her heart at last. I say to break her heart at last. Great Heaven! what is there I can do? She belongs to him now, not to me. My day is over!"

His head drooped low until his chin rested upon his breast, and then I found voice to say—

"You can do nothing until you hear from Lilias; and I can only say, hope that Rodwell Kearney is not all that you have imagined him. Surely there must be some good in him, to so utterly win an innocent girl's heart."

He looked at me half-blankly, half-pitifully.

"You don't know men and their ways," he said, heavily, "and you don't know of what vice a Kearney is capable. I was a blind fool to have sheltered mother and son beneath my roof; but it was my wife's last wish, and I obeyed it as long as I could. My girl! my poor girl! Diana, the worst thing of all is that she could so deliberately and cruelly deceive me, that she could so forget all the years we have spent in harmony together trample all the love I lavished upon her under foot!"

I could not restrain my tears at sight of his

grief, and seeing this he at once controlled himself.

"Poor child!" he said, gently, "this has been a shock to you too, and you are not strong yet. Go to your room and try to rest."

"But," I urged, "you will do nothing rashly. Remember she is still your child."

His face darkened.

"Against her my doors will never be closed, if she comes alone; but no Kearney shall ever set foot in my house whilst the breath is in my body. I will provide adequately for her wants; but in my life time the man who has taken advantage of a child's infatuation shall never waste my substance in riotous living. There, there, child, go to bed and forget that you have seen me brought so low."

He took my hand and gently pressed it, whilst a moment he looked into my eyes with something, I trembly believed, like tenderness in his own.

Then I made my way to my room, but not to sleep. The study was immediately below me, and all through that bad night I heard the Colonel pacing to and fro, scarcely ever resting; and I who loved him, who longed with all my soul to comfort him, had not the right to go to him in his despair; could only pray with fast falling tears that Heaven would be gracious to him, and to that wilful child, who had done her best to break a heart of gold.

In the morning the promised letter arrived from Lilias; and I was proud that Colonel Wardale should give it me to read after he himself had seen it. She wrote without regret, poor child, poor child! and she evidently expected that he would condone this offence, as he had forgiven all previous and venial ones. Here is what she wrote:

"MY DEAR FATHER—

"I am afraid you were angry when you received Rodwell's message; but you know you were just a wee bit too severe with your poor little girl, very unjust to my dear husband. Then when you threatened to send me to school, though I pretended to agree, I never meant to go. I have had to deceive you a long while, and it is quite a relief to be able to write to you candidly."

"I have regularly received letters from auntie and Rodwell never mind how. I don't wish to hurt anyone, and it was not Diana who helped; and at last we agreed it would be better to get married, knowing, dear daddy, you could not hold out any longer then; because according to a convenient vulgarism 'It's of no use crying over spilt milk.'"

"I never went to Kent at all, but straight to auntie's flat, and yesterday Rodwell and I were married. He has begged a fortnight's leave, which we shall spend in Spain; and, dear daddy, when you see how fond he is of me, how much in earnest he is in his endeavours to make me happy, you will not hesitate to give me your congratulations."

"Please let us find a letter from you waiting us at auntie's on our return—a nice letter, minus scolding, for really and truly I am so happy that I could sing the livelong day. Auntie will continue to live with us. I cannot yet learn to call her mother. Kind regards to Diana, who will be awfully shocked at my escapade, and love from myself and Rodwell to your own dear self. I hope you don't miss me too much. Your loving daughter,

"LILIAS KEARNEY."

"Well," he said, when I laid the letter aside, "what shall I do?" then without waiting a reply he rang; and on the appearance of servant, gave orders that Mr. Kennedy, the family solicitor, should be sent for.

He came quickly, Colonel Wardale being a valuable client, and in my presence a deed was drawn up, by which he settled seven hundred pounds per annum on the young couple until his own decease; after which, their income should be increased to fifteen hundred, but the estate and remainder of his

personal property should be held in trust for his daughter's children, should she chance to become a mother. In default of this, at her death all should pass to the distant relatives in Kent, leaving Rodwell Kearney a small annuity that "he might not be tempted to prey upon his neighbours."

The housekeeper and I were witnesses to this document, and when all was signed and sealed, and Mr. Kennedy had taken his leave, the Colonel seated himself moodily at the table.

"I must protect her," he said, heavily. "I will not leave her to their mercy. I shall lodge a letter with Estalia Kearney which Lillias will receive on her return; and if she chooses to come here as my child my arms are open to her—if she comes as his wife in his company I refuse to see her. There! it is useless to plead for her, Miss Hill, my mind is fully resolved."

That was a heavy day for us, and I think that each felt the awkwardness of the other's position. I was glad when the second post brought me a letter from Miss Harrison, in which she said,—

"Of course you know that the vacation has commenced. We begin again July seven-teenth; and I thought if you could join me at once it would be nice to travel together to Clacton-on-Sea, then on our return you could at once commence your duties. Reply by wire, as I have still to engage rooms and see to a thousand things before shutting Regent House."

I carried my letter to Colonel Wardale. He gave a little start as he read it, then he said, quietly,—

"You would of course like to go at once? My daughter's rash action makes it almost necessary you should. Very well, pray consider yourself at liberty to leave Forest Gate when you will."

My heart seemed like ice within me. His words and looks were frigid, and remember that I loved him with all my foolish heart.

"If I can be of any service to you," I began, "I will stay until you need me no longer. But now that Lillias has gone there is nothing I can do. It is best that I should go."

"Far best," he answered, slowly. "I shall close the house and go abroad. Not too far away, for soon or late my child will need me. I must consider her welfare now more than ever I did. When do you go?"

"To-morrow morning," I answered. "I shall then reach Horseswall by six."

"If there is anything I can do for you, Miss Hill, pray command me," he said, and that concluded our interview.

For the rest of the day, I went about like one in a dreadful dream. I was leaving him, and I knew as well as though I were a prophet, I should never love any but this hero of my youth; and I feared that I never should see or hear of him again. When I went down early in the morning, to my surprise, I found him waiting me.

"You must breakfast," he said, authorita-tively. "You shall not leave Wardale Court with a wrong opinion of its hospitality."

He handed me a cup of chocolate, but I refused all the delicacies he urged upon me. I simply could not eat, and all the while, I feared I should break down utterly. Presently, the carriage came to the door; I held out my hand to him.

"Goodbye!" I said, "and thank you for all your goodness to me."

He clasped my finger close, Good-bye! "You have made sunshine in my home, and I shall miss you sorely. After all, what poor inconsequent things partings are! And now Diana you will go your way, and I go mine. It is scarcely probable we shall meet again. Soon you will forget us and be happy in a home of your own, it will be better so. You are young, and I have dreamed a foolish dream and then he drew me close, and with gentle hands brushed back the rings of hair about my forehead, and kissing me once, solemnly, slowly upon the brow, left me

there, and blinded by a mist of falling tears, I made my way through the hall.

He loved me! Oh, he must love me so to have looked and spoken, and I, coward and fool, dared not utter the words which should have told him all the truth.

He loved me! he loved me! Ah then come what would, I must be the better woman for that blessed knowledge.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS HARRISON and I, had a pleasant and quiet holiday at Clacton-on-Sea, returning quite fresh and ready for work, although I must admit, that after my easy life at Wardale Court, I felt sometimes that my duties were too many for me.

Still it was nice to be with the old set again. A few girls had left, but most of the faces at Regent House were still familiar to me.

With the new quarter, there came a new scholar, the daughter of a struggling lawyer, who at first did not interest me at all, but when I found that she knew Mrs. Kearney, I was anxious to cultivate her, if only that I might hear news of Lillias, and of him from time to time.

"We lived in the flat above the Kearneys," Miss Cobbold said, one day in early August, but since Mr. Kearney married his rich cousin, they have moved into a beautiful little house at Kensington; and Mrs. Kearney senior, acknowledges mamma just when and where she pleases. For my own part I would not submit to it, and if I were young Mrs. Kearney, I would not live with that horrid woman for untold gold. But of course she is very fond of that handsome husband of hers."

"And he is good to her?" I asked, speaking as indifferently as I could.

"Of course, at least I suppose so. They are always seen together, and mamma says she is awfully proud of him. Then it was quite a romantic marriage, an elopement in fact. Mrs. Kearney said that her father was opposed to it, and treated her so unkindly that she ran away."

"That is false," I said, my cheeks burning with indignation. "Are you sure Lillias Kearney said such an awful thing of the best father under the sun?"

"Oh you know then," Miss Cobbold replied, coolly. "That explains your interest in them! Well it might not have been Mrs. Kearney junior, who made that statement. I think after all it was the old one, she is a perfect Sapphira, although mamma does believe in her. She is always inventing excuses, to explain why Colonel Wardale does not visit them, or they run down to his place, which according to Mrs. Kearney senior, is very beautiful. She, you know, rules the house at Kensington, and folks say that she does so against her daughter-in-law's wishes; but I dare say that is only ill-natured gossip. I suppose you know that the Colonel is meditating an awfully extensive tour?"

To this query I made no answer, neither did Miss Cobbold seem to expect any, for she chattered away on matters in which I had no interest, and seemed wholly to forget that she had ever known or heard of the Kearneys. We never referred to the subject again and, when nine months later she left school, it seemed to me I had heard the last of Lillias and her father. But there I was mistaken. Just three months' later I received a letter from Miss Cobbold, written in her characteristic style, but it gave me pleasure as well as pain, for it showed me she still remembered me kindly; and when one is all out alone in the world, one is apt to be over-weeningly grateful for small mercies.

"MY DEAR HILLY (she wrote)—

"If I had dared to address you in such a fashion in my flourishing days I wonder what

would have been my punishment! But I am emancipated now, and more than that am engaged—still more, I am to be married in the course of three weeks. There never was so lucky a girl as I; you see I am neither pretty nor clever, and yet I am going to make quite a grand match, but, dear Hilley, I never gave a thought to what he had or what he could give me, because I loved him from the first. And now I want you to be very kind; I have told mamma and Rex (that is his name—isn't it nice?) how good you were to me at Horseswall, when I had no idea that I should ever blossom into anything greater than a nursery governess. I want you to officiate as bridesmaid; I should like to see your dear, honest cheerful face beside me on the eventful morning.

"I don't think, you little country mouse, you quite know how you creep into folks' hearts without any seeming effort of your own. I would rather be married quietly, and so would Rex, but mamma says no, being over-ruled by Mrs. Kearney who is once more her sworn ally and friend.

"I am rather afraid things don't run very smoothly in that ménage, little Mrs. Rodwell, is not brilliant as she used to be. I understand they have seven hundred per annum and live at the rate of seven thousand, and that domestic squabbles are not infrequent. But come to town and judge for yourself; by mamma's wish the Kearney trio will be conspicuous guests—the Colonel is still abroad. With love to dear old Harrison, all the girls I know, and hoping you will prove tractable, I am always yours,

"TISSIE COBBOLD."

Well, I did not go to Tissie's wedding; I felt I could not meet the Kearneys, and I knew but a brief glimpse of town life would but unfit me for the dull routine of daily duties; so I wrote my refusal as graciously as it was in me to do, and did my best to forget all about Tissie and the Kearneys, and was mortified beyond measure to find how ill I succeeded.

I heard later that Tissie and her husband had sailed for India, and then for another six months no news of any kind reached me. It was on a very cold January day, that I sitting alone (all the pupils were walking with Mademoiselle and Miss Harrison taking tea with an old friend) heard a sudden sharp ringing of the hall bell, then a weary, gasping voice which somehow seemed familiar to me, next the stolid tramp of the honest Biddy, who announced that a lady wished to see me, and before she had made an end of her message, a slight figure darted in, quick impetuous hands had shut the door upon her, and there half-kneeling, half-crouching at my feet was Lillias—oh! such a changed Lillias—even the sheen of her hair seemed dimmed, and after the first moment I could not see her face, for she had hidden it in my skirts.

I thought of her father and how she had wounded him—and ah! wicked that I was, my heart hardened against her; then I remembered how he had loved her always, how patient and tender he had been, even when she was most provoking, and I hated myself that I had ever harboured one unkind thought of her.

I put my hands beneath her chin and lifted her face that I might judge what ailed her; it struck me with a sharp pang to see the change in her. Her blue eyes were dim, there were great dark circles beneath them, and her cheeks were fallen in as though with want; the cupid-like mouth had now a bitter downward curve, and her whole appearance was so changed that I began to cry.

She caught my hands quickly. "You are sorry for me?" she panted. "Oh, yes, your eyes tell me that! What a fool I was ever to doubt you, good Diana, true Diana! But they had poisoned my mind against you and my father—she—that dreadful woman, and he—my husband! Oh, you do not know her cruelty or his neglect!"

"Hush, hush!" I cried. "Darling Lillias, remember he is still your husband."

She laughed out shrilly then.

"I remember," she said, "she would not let me forget it if I could! Ah! let me speak, let me save myself from madness if I may. I have so much to tell you!" and here (pressing her hands to her temples), "nothing seems clear—I am like one lost!"

"I wander in an impenetrable maze. I am so shaken and so weak, I seem to forget my old identity. Look at me! look at me!" striking herself fiercely on her poor breast. "Did you ever see a woman more changed, and, oh! I am so young to be so unhappy. I am not nineteen yet. Di—not nineteen, and I have borne so much since I left home that I seem to be an old woman;" and then she began to cry so forlornly, that if ever I had nourished anger against her, I could do so no more.

I took her in my arms, and mingled my tears with hers, and when she had grown a little quieter, I prayed her to tell me all, so that if help were possible I might afford it. Sitting at my feet, she laid bare to me all the secrets of her wretched married life, not crying any longer, only speaking slowly and apathetically as though love and hope had flown from her for ever, and death would be a blessed and longed-for release.

"It all began—my misery I mean—directly the honeymoon ended, and we returned to town. Aunt Eulalia was very angry at what she termed the shabby allowance my father made me, and said such bitter things of him, that we often quarrelled. But Rodwell was not unkind to me then, and in a little while I grew accustomed to his mother's bitter tongue, at last so much accustomed, that I made no complaints to him. We went out a good deal, and I, who had never been required to render account of my expenditure, was doubtless, to the full, as extravagant as Rodwell; it seemed to me that seven hundred pounds a year would do a great deal, and then there was Aunt's allowance. We went on brightly and pleasantly for almost twelve months, but although Mr. Kennedy kept me informed as to my father's whereabouts, I refused to write to him, saying in my ingratitude and pride that I would never hold out the olive branch to one who scorned my husband. You see I kept my faith in him in all and through all, for that first year, although I found he was not the hero I had made of him.

"Directly after our marriage he had resigned his post, alleging ill-health as an excuse, and I believed him. But when the year was gone, and bills began to pour in from every side, life grew unendurable. Mrs. Kearney was constantly upbraiding me for my uselessness, and what she was pleased to call my poverty, whilst Rodwell as constantly implored me to write to my father for assistance.

"It was then I first understood how much I had wronged him, and pride revolted from making the first advance whilst all the time my heart was so sick and grieved, that I thought it must break. And when they found me obdurate, they changed wholly to me. I think Rodwell never would have been actively unkind, but for her—Aunt Eulalia—and always she reviled me to him, vowing that our troubles were of my own making, and I grew so wretched that I did not care any longer to please, but let matters drift as they would, and Rodwell took to staying out late at night, and coming home more or less intoxicated. Then he used to swear at me and papa, and sometimes at you, and at last I learnt from aunt's own lips the story of her deception, and how they had turned my heart against you.

"Things went from bad to worse; but I never knew how bad they had become until this morning. I have been ill of late and have not risen early, and when my maid came in about eleven, I turned a little crossly upon her I think, telling her I should not dress until the afternoon. Mr. and Mrs. Kearney were not to wait luncheon for me."

She looking curiously at me, answered that Rodwell and his mother had gone away by the

ten train, and there were some men in the house behaving very curiously, and would I please come down, as the servants were making strange remarks. I did not know what it meant. I will solemnly swear that; so I dressed and went downstairs, trembling and angry too. And then—then Diana—I learned the bitter and shameful truth—the landlord had levied a distress for rent. I did not understand until one man more civil than the others condescended to explain, and my home—our home—was gone! My husband had left me to face the battle alone, and then, then I knew him for what he was, and cried out for the father whose love had been my shield, whose care I had so ill rewarded. Those dreadful men took everything. They laughed, sang and talked as they seized upon this or that favourite piece of furniture, or the pictures I most had prized, and I all the while sitting weeping there.

"When they were gone, there ensued the worst scene of all. The servants crowded round me demanding their wages, all but my maid upbraiding me cruelly. I had nothing left but my jewellery. I gave it to Rose to sell, and I paid them all—all save Rose, who is waiting for me now in the hall. Then I wrote to Mr. Kennedy asking him to break the news to papa. He sent me back a business-like note (he has hated me ever since I behaved so wickedly) in which he said he would forward my letter to papa, but he did not offer me a shelter, and so—so, Diana, I came to you, all other hearts being closed against me. Ah, for my father's sake, you will not send me away?"

I took her feverish hands in mine.

"Whilst you need a friend, trust me, and try to believe that this estrangement between yourself and your husband is but temporary. When this cloud has passed you will be happier than you have ever been before."

"No," she said, drearily, "I shall never be happy again. Rose gave me Rodwell's last written message, it was this—

"When your father consents to receive me as his son and heir, then, and then only will I return to you. And Diana, you know how determined papa is—know now, that I—his child, say that never, never any more shall he suffer grief because of those who have abused his bounty," and then, with a low wild cry, she fell prone upon the floor, and, I believe, more alarmed than I care to tell, ran out to call her maid—a tall, slender, capable girl.

"Can we get her to bed, miss?" she said, quickly. "Poor lady, she has suffered cruelly."

"She can have my room," I answered, for I knew Miss Harrison would raise no objection to such a plan, and in some way we contrived to get her upstairs, but she was quite unconscious.

Presently Miss Harrison came home, and having heard my story and seen the patient, she looked very grave.

"I am glad she came here, Diana. She will be quite safe with us until we can hear from her father. I will wire to Mr. Kennedy at once."

So Rose and I were constituted the poor child's nurses, I being excused all scholastic duties. Miss Harrison's own doctor attended her, looking more anxious than I liked to see.

Mr. Kennedy had sent off his confidential clerk in search of Colonel Wardale, and the young life hung in the balance.

Of the Kearneys we heard nothing, and of Lillias's hiding place they were then quite ignorant.

So we kept watch over her, whilst she raved or lay in a heavy stupor, and then her baby was born prematurely. It just breathed, no more, and when the young mother woke to consciousness the cold earth covered its quiet little limbs. When she heard this she seemed almost relieved.

"Doctor," said Miss Harrison, "what is your opinion of her?"

"She is sinking fast. If Colonel Wardale

would see her alive, he must use all speed on his journey.

CHAPTER VII.

COLONEL WARDLE travelled night and day in answer to Mr. Kennedy's message, and reached Horsewall long before we had expected him. I met him in the hall, and by my looks showed how the change in him shocked me. He smiled sadly at that.

"I am getting quite an old man, Diana," he said, "and my troubles have weighed heavily upon me."

I could not speak, I could only lay my hand in his, and wish with all my heart that I could say some comforting word to him; but I think he understood.

"You will take me to her," he said, slowly releasing my fingers. "Is she conscious now?"

"Yes, and asking always for you. Come," and I led the way upstairs.

As we entered the fair head upon the pillows was a little lifted, the falling voice, which never more should make music in the old home, breathed rather than said,—

"So daddy, darling, you have come to your wicked, ungrateful, remorseful child!" and then she was in his arms, his face was bowed above hers, and as I turned to leave them I heard a hoarse sob break from her lips.

We kept the house very quiet then. The pupils were stilled by the solemnity of the shadow of death which hung over the house. The room which Lillias occupied was quite at the rear and removed from the dormitories, so that no sound came to disturb her in these last hours.

After her father's arrival all restlessness left her. When I was recalled to her room I found her lying with her head upon his breast, a faint smile playing about her lips.

Each had been weeping bitterly; but with those tears all heart burnings were washed away, soul spoke to soul, and in that speaking met, and so love was perfected.

She stretched out her hand to me.

"Dear Diana," she said, "I did not think there were so many left to love me. I hardly believed that even my good father could forgive me all my wrong and my deceit. Long ago, daddy dear, I wished I were worthier to be your child. I used to feel so hard and wicked towards you, and those who had been fed by your bounty encouraged me in my wickedness. But Diana! oh, how silly I was to doubt her when she so pleaded for you, and grew so justly angry with me."

The Colonel lifted his gaze to my face then, and I know now, that in that glance he read something of the truth.

"Stay with me," Lillias added, presently, "both of you. I like to have you near."

"And your husband?" questioned her father. "Lillias, my dearest, will you not see him? You know, my child, how short a space is left you."

She was very quiet a moment, then she answered under her breath,—

"Yes, I know, and I will see Rodwell, I would not like him to feel himself unforgiven. I loved him once, you know."

So Rodwell Kearney was sent for, and he came just in time to witness the closing scenes of the life he had so wrecked. He seemed unfeignedly shocked when first he entered the sick room, but presently recovering his usual sang froid spoke airily of "little differences" between himself and Lillias, but added that they could all be nicely adjusted and life would be pleasant again with them.

The young wife smiled faintly, alas! that there should be an element of scorn in that smile.

"I am dying!" she said, more firmly than she yet had spoken. "I never shall leave this house until I am carried from it. Do not so deceive yourself, Rodwell," and then whilst her hands rested on the waving gold of his hair, "Father, for my sake, because I once

held him dearer than life, promise that you will never suffer him to want."

"I have made provision for him already."

She lifted her mouth to be kissed before she again addressed her husband.

"We made a mistake, Rod," she said, very gently, "but the results, though bitter, will not last long; and oh! my dear, I hope when I am passed away you will find a wiser woman than I to share your lot."

I hated him as he knelt there, shedding his hypocritical tears, I hated him more when, weeping of the quiet of the sick-room, he went out to seek his own pleasure.

Once he asked Lillias if she would see his mother. She answered with a negative gesture and a strong shudder.

"No, never any more; and when I am dead do not let her come to look upon me, do not speak of her again. Perhaps—I don't know if it would have been so—but I have thought sometimes we might have been happy but for her."

She was too weak to talk more then; but at night she revived again, and turned a smiling face upon her father.

"Daddy," she said, "I am going fast, so what I have to say I must say quickly. Long ago I read your secret, and I was angry; now I know how wicked was my anger, and I want to set things right. Let me look at you fully whilst I speak. Soon I shall not see your dear face any more. I read by the light of my own love that this good, forgiving Diana had grown very precious to you. You will not say 'nay' to this?"

"I cannot," he answered, "although I thought I had hidden my folly well."

"But it was not folly, for this same Diana loved and worshipped you as you deserve, although never a word would she say!"

She had moved a little towards me, but I could look neither at her nor the Colonel. I could only bury my face in her pillows and wait for what must follow.

"She never guessed that I—made wise by others—had stolen her secret; and now, oh, my dear! when I am going away from you, I cannot bear to think of your lonely life. I did not consider these things once; but I see clearer now. Daddy, darling, you do love Diana still?"

With my head still bent, I heard him answer—

"With all my heart, child!"

And then touching me with chill fingers, she questioned—

"And you, Diana? You have not changed? All is with you, as I guessed?"

I answered yes, whilst my heart beat so fast and loud I could scarcely hear my own voice. Then she said—

"Come round to my right. Daddy, she is good to look upon, she is kind and true, and here is a heart of gold. Take her hand in yours, and let me before I die, hear you promise to make each other happy as I once hoped to be!"

"Diana," said the Colonel, gravely, as he took my hand, "am I to call this mine? Will you let me believe that Lillias has read your heart aright?"

And then I, who had always been so sad a coward, lifted my eyes to his, and I could not hide my love longer.

"Lillias is right," I said. "I have always loved you," and then he stooping kissed me, not upon my brow this time, but upon my lips, and as he kissed me I prayed that I might prove a helpmate worthy him, that never, never should he regret the love he had lavished upon me.

Lillias smiled over our betrothal.

"I am content now," she said, "father will not miss me so badly having you. Now I want to rest."

She fell asleep soon after, and when she woke we knew she was near, so weak had grown her voice, so white her face.

"Is there anything you wish to say, dear heart?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, I would like you to marry Diana as

soon as possible. She is all alone in the world, even as you; and oh! may Heaven bless you both and keep you glad!" Then a little later she added, "Where is Rodwell?"

"He went down to the village? Shall I send for him?"

"It would be too late," she answered, with a faint sigh; "but you will tell him I freely forgave him. I was not fit to be a wife, I was a poor wilful girl; but you will let my suffering atone for my folly, and try to think as kindly of me as you can. Oh! if only I had my life to come over again, how differently I would use it!" Then as the night wore on, "It is nearly over now, I am not afraid," and those were her last words to us.

She breathed slowly and faintly for, perhaps, half an hour. Then the great change came, Dunstan turned to me, and with hand clasping hand we watched her flight; then I left him alone with his dear dead.

It might have been an hour later when Rodwell returned. He was flushed and had evidently been drinking, and as I met him in the hall, he asked loudly for his wife, and made as though to go to her room, but I intercepted him.

"No," I said, sternly, "not now! not in your present state, such indignity shall not be done to her. Rodwell Kearney, she is dead, and in dying she forgave you!"

"Dead!" he echoed. "Then what is to become of me?"

"I neither know nor care!" I retorted, sharply, for his selfishness, his callousness roused all the evil temper in me. "I suppose Colonel Wardale will not suffer you to wait for his dead child's sake. And now, I would advise you to go to your room at once. Tomorrow, when you are sober, you may be admitted to her presence," and without a word he went.

He shed a great many tears over his poor young wife when we lowered her into her grave beside her dead child, and I think those tears hardened Dunstan against him more than anything else could have done.

When the last sad rites were ended, they had an interview—the last they ever held—in which the Colonel promised to allow Rodwell and his mother four hundred a year, until Rodwell married again, when," he added, "I think I shall have more than fulfilled my word to the child your neglect killed."

Then he came to me, and taking my hand, said—

"It is true, Diana, that you love me, and are ready to give your life into my hands?"

"It is true," I answered, daring to look at him; "you must believe that."

"I should be a most miserable wretch if I could not. And, Diana, you remember Lillias wished that there should be no unnecessary delay—when will you marry me?"

And I answered him without fear or shame.

"When you will."

Five years ago I came as mistress at Wardale Court and it has been my joy to know that, with each passing year, my husband's love for me has suffered no change, that I am as essential to his happiness now, as in the days of our sad honeymoon, when his daughter's death lay heavy on our hearts. Miss Harrison now resides with us, having found her scholastic duties too hard for her, and now constitutes herself nurse, governess, friend in one to our two children—little Dunstan and May. The latter I would have christened Lillias, but Dunstan negated my wish.

"To me that name will always be unfortunate," he said, "call her Mary," and from Mary it was shortened to May.

Mrs. Kearney died suddenly shortly after poor Lillias, and as Rodwell quickly married a rich elderly widow, all correspondence ceased between us. He is a man of substance now, and has alike forgotten his benefactor and the fair young wife whose life he spoiled, and whose heart he broke.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

THE good die young. The bad live to live about the weather, and are spoken of as the oldest inhabitants.

THE first thing a poor man does and the last thing a rich man does is to rush into a lawsuit.

NO wonder typewriters are so successful—they always have their business at their fingers' ends.

THERE are two kinds of women in the world: one kind sits and cries silently about her wrongs, and the other storms and raves about her rights.

DR. GARRY: "Is that girl across the street who plays the piano familiar with Gounod?" Gills: "She must think so, she takes such liberties with him."

SMITH (at an amateur musical party): "What's he singing?" Miss Clef: "Let Me Like a Soldier Fall." Smith: "If I had my rifle with me he should be gratified."

PROMPTLY PAID—Landlord: "There'll be the devil to pay if you young gentlemen break anything here." College Boy: "Well, I have just broken a glass—so here's your money."

"You have moved into the suburbs, haven't you?" "Yes; how did you know?" "I saw you hurrying down the street with both arms full of bundles yesterday."

A LOVER'S thermometer fills a long-felt want. A young man has only to test the warmth of his girl's affection to learn whether she expects a watch and chain or only a box of bon-bons.

"You young rascal," said an old gentleman to a rash little boy in the street, "if that cab had run over you, where would you have been now?" "Up behind, a-takin' of his number," replied the boy.

THE TELL-TALE EVIDENCE.—Mother: "I think our John is courting some girl." Father: "Hey? Is he beginning to have vaseline on his hair?" Mother: "No; he is beginning to have it on his shirt bosoms."

"I PICKED that vase up in Rome. The armorer I picked up in Paris." "I expected to find a lot of nice things here. Your brother told me last winter, when I asked after your health, that you were picking up all the time."

MRS. LAFFERTY (visitor): "Your daughter has a fine touch, Mrs. Moriarty." Mrs. Moriarty: "Yes, so they do be tellin' me; an', sure, 'tis no wonder, for she loves the penny, an' never tires of it. She has a great taste for music; but this sha'n't be owing natural, for her gran'father had his skull laid open wid a cornet at a temperance picnic."

NEW GIRL: "Please, mum, while you're down town, would ye be so kind as to order me a pair o' shoes?" Mrs. De Style: "I—er—do not know your size." New girl: "Nor I, mum; but I think if ye get them about the size of yours they'll do." Mrs. De Style (bewilderingly): "Do you think ye could wear them?" New Girl: "Oh, yes, mum. After new shoes is wet they shrink."

GILKROOL: "What a wonderful thing the electric light is." Gus De Smith: "Yes, it is wonderful. I expect after a while it will be used to make the crops grow, instead of the sun." "There are some crops now that thrive by electric light." "Nonsense." "No nonsense about it. There are lots of young men who sow most of their wild oats by electric light."

HENRY asked his mamma one day, "Why do people hunt lions and tigers?" Quoth mamma, "Because they kill the nice, good, little sheep and lambs, my darling." Henry reflected deeply in his small mind, and after an interval of some minutes, came out with question number two: "Then, mamma, why don't they hunt butchers as well? They ought to, you know!"

SOCIETY.

DYSPEPSIA is often mistaken for heart disease.

SUFFERERS from gout rarely suffer from other maladies.

THERE are one hundred and twenty-five bishops of the Church of England distributed over the world.

ONE good effect of short skirts, if ever generally adopted, will be to force women to learn how to walk well.

THE Polish ladies intend wearing nothing but black this year, to celebrate the centenary of their country's loss of freedom.

BARON VON PAWELL RAMMINGEN, who is at Biarritz, is still suffering from the effects of the influenza, of which he had a severe attack at Hampton Court Palace. He is gradually getting better thanks to the climate of Biarritz, and is able to accompany Princess Frederica in her daily drives.

GREAT preparations are already being made at Madrid for the "Columbus" Exhibition next October in honour of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America. The Belgian Government contributes the cradle of Charles V. and the mantle of Montezuma, which have never yet quitted Belgium.

YET another profession for women has been brought to light—namely, that of designing book covers. It is a special gift, not unrelated to that of cartoon drawing, but one which in this country has not been so much followed as is the case in the United States. A good cover is almost as attractive as a good title, and it seems that the striking covers of many of the American editions are due to the ingenuity of women.

IT is an open secret that the Duke of Connaught is destined to succeed the Duke of Cambridge as the Horse Guards. The Duke of Wellington and Baron Stockmar both concurred in advising Prince Albert that the command of the Army should always be in the hands of a member of the Royal Family, and the Prince impressed the Queen with the justice of their views, and it is believed to have left an elaborate memorandum on the subject.

EMPEROR WILLIAM has ordered a new throne to be constructed, of which the frame and decorations are to be of pure gold, while the coverings and draperies will be of the richest purple velvet. The old throne of the Kings of Prussia was broken up after Jena, for the sake of the precious metals with which it was adorned, and since that period their Majesties have possessed only a couple of State chairs.

THE Queen seems to have an old-fashioned prejudice against fanciful names, for she has expressed her desire that the bride to be of the Duke of Clarence shall be called until her marriage Princess Victoria Mary. It is easy to believe that this command will not be at all pleasing to the young Princess, who has always been known as "May," and evidently prefers that to her other names, as it is by this one that she always signs herself.

THE Duke of Clarence is a very great favourite with hostesses who have entertained him. They always speak most highly in his praise, and say how thoughtful, courteous, and gentle he always is, and how, in spite of his exalted rank and great position, he gives so little trouble in a house, through his unselfish thought for other people. His way of receiving congratulation on his engagement is frank and manly, and he looks so pleased and just a little shy that it is felt to be a real happy ending to a pretty romance. Princess May will have a popular Royal Duke for her husband, with magnificent prospects; but she will also have a real instinctive gentleman with an idea of women exalted to a very high pitch by contemplation of his Royal mother, and these qualifications will do more to ensure domestic happiness than those others which superficially seem to be the most desirable.

STATISTICS.

THE Suez canal is 26 feet deep.

EIGHT hundred thousand people still speak Welsh.

FOR every foot of stature a man should weigh 26 lb.

ONLY 9 per cent. of cases of amputation are fatal.

FORTY-EIGHT pennies weigh as nearly as possible 1 lb.

OWING to its rarefaction, the air beyond a certain height is incapable of sustaining clouds. The principal masses of clouds are contained in the air at a height of between 4 500 and 7 500 feet, the average being rather more than a mile.

GEMS.

AVOID circumlocution in language. Words, like cannon balls, should go straight to their mark.

IF a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.

OUR life is determined for us, and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing, and only think of bearing what is laid upon us, and doing what is given us to do.

THE ultimate fate of the wicked is a matter that need not concern any individual, provided the individual so behaves as to get himself out of the ranks of the wicked.

THE pretty woman fades with the roses on her cheeks; and the girlhood that lasts an hour; the beautiful woman finds her fullness of bloom only when a past has written itself on her, and her power is then most irresistible when it seems going.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LUNCH CAKE.—Half pound of flour, three ounces of butter, four ounces of sugar, two eggs, quarter of a pound of currants, one gill of milk, quarter of a teaspoonful carbonate soda, one tablespoonful of vinegar. Beat butter and sugar to a cream. Drop the eggs in one by one, beating thoroughly. Then stir in half of the flour and half of the currants mixed. Mix the soda, milk, and vinegar together, and quickly add it—then add the remainder of the flour and currants. Pour into a papered and buttered cake tin, and bake about an hour.

GINGER APPLES.—Four pounds of apples, four pounds of sugar, half pound of whole ginger. Infuse the ginger in boiling water for a few hours, and then strain it; pare the apples, cut them in quarters, and throw them into cold water; put into the jellypan the sugar and four breakfast cupsful of water, using the infusion of the ginger as part of it and let it boil five minutes; now lift the apples out of the water, and put them in the pan and boil for three-quarters of an hour, and put in pots. Newton pippins or firm apples are best.

SPONGE CAKE.—Four eggs, half pound of white sugar, half pound of white flour, three quarters of a teaspoonful baking powder, one teaspoonful essence of lemon, quarter of a teaspoonful of milk. Put the sugar and eggs in a good-sized basin, and beat them with the whisk or two forks for twenty minutes. Take out the whisk and put in a spoon, and stir the flour in very gently, then the milk, baking powder, and essence. Pour it into a greased and floured cake tin, and put into a moderate oven till ready. There is no butter in a sponge cake, and common flour, and not self-raising flour, is what is used.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ST. PETERSBURG is the oldest capital in Europe.

THE common cabbage is really a seashore plant.

THE African detritus are slowly becoming habitable.

IN France the average family comprises three members; in England four; in Ireland five.

THE smallest steam-engine ever made has been constructed by a machinist in Chemnitz, Saxony. The fly-wheel is two-fifths of an inch in diameter.

THE first mention that can be traced to coffee in England was made in the year 1600. A duty of 4s. per gallon was levied on the maker.

REINDEER flesh, which is said to be tender, delicious, and nutritious, is regularly exported from the Arctic zone to Hamburg, where it meets eager demand at about 6s. a pound.

IN China the planters cultivate the tea plant by digging a hole into which they put a handful of seeds. In Assam they plant the seeds on small ridges of earth and cover them over.

RUSSIA is preparing for trouble. The Government had ordered 500 000 rifles from French manufacturers, and has given contracts for a still larger number to makers in her own country. On the first of July, 1891, she expects to have 1 790 000 new rifles.

A NEW skate will be on the market this year. The inventor claims it can be put on in half the time that other styles take. Those who have watched a young man put on his best girl's skates will not feel disposed to dispute this claim.

WE should be greatly surprised to see our every-day bread come to our tables tied with yellow and green ribbons, or decorated with golden stars, but there was a time in England when so simple a thing as gingerbread was treated in a much more extraordinary way. In its earlier form, gingerbread was simply a bread paste, with ginger and sweetening added. A very crude imagination went to work at it, and the market places were crowded with gingerbread kings and queens, saints and roosters, adorned with gilt crowns and sceptres, with halos, wings and tails.

THE oldest roebush in the world is at Hildersheim, an old town in Hanover, capital of a Prussian administrative district. It was planted more than 1 000 years ago by Charlemagne in commemoration of a visit made to him by the ambassador of the Caliph Haroun al Raschid of "Arabian Nights" fame. After it had become a flourishing vine a cathedral was built over it, the date of building being doubtful. It is known, however, that a coffin-shaped vault was built around its sacred roots in the year 818, the vault and bush surviving a fire which destroyed the cathedral in 1146. The bush is now said to be twenty-six feet high and to cover thirty-two feet of the wall. The stem, after one hundred years growth, is only two inches in diameter.

GENERALLY speaking, there are two kinds of stomachs—the acid and the bilious stomach. Everybody has one or the other, and each requires different food and care. Do fruits, acid foods and drinks make you feel bad, cause dyspepsia or colic pains nearly every time you eat them? Then you have an acid stomach, and it is well to avoid all foods that have an excess of acids in them. Your greatest remedy after a meal is bicarbonate of soda, carbonic water or vichy. Do fat meats, grease and other rich, fatty substances cause nausea, vomiting and sickness? Then you have a bilious stomach. Your greatest remedy is to avoid all fatty and greasy foods as much as possible, and eat fruit and foods containing plenty of acids. Acid drinks are the best medicines that you can take.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CLARICE.—Signor is pronounced "seenyor."
GODMOTHER.—God-parents are under no legal liabilities whatever.

MUSIC.—Rossini's "Stabat Mater" was composed partly in 1832 and partly in 1841.

MONEY.—A person cannot bequeath property he does not actually possess.

CONSTANT READER.—You will get puncheon-stone from any painter or colourman. A pennyworth will last for years.

JOHNNY SCOUT.—To South Africa the fare and incidental expenses run into £30.

T. T.—The timber of the orchard belongs to the landlord.

OLD SOLDIER.—You are entitled to a pension. Apply to Royal Hospital, Chelsea.

INQUIRER.—By parcel post, costing 3d., seeing the book does not weigh more than one pound.

DOROTHY.—Rooken End is the southern extremity of the Isle of Wight.

AN ADMIRER.—Stanley's last expedition was a private enterprise organised by the Royal Geographical Society.

STELLA.—Dante was the greatest of all Italian poets. You might very fairly call him the Italian Milton.

HOMERICHOF.—The "bench of bishops" in the Upper House consists of twenty-six members.

ABOUCHE.—The cheapest way is to take a through ticket from the Anchor Line Co. Cost between £8 and £9.

H. P.—There is a grand jury at all quarter sessions held for the trial of prisoners.

AGED P.—It all depends whether the bankrupt has got his discharge.

LION.—We have been unable to trace the paragraph to which you refer.

G. B.—In the absence of an agreement you must give six months' notice to leave at Christmas, 1892.

MOLLY.—The First Suffolk have scarlet uniforms with white facings.

FRANK.—A landlord is not compelled to take money on account, though it is usually wise to do so.

GENTLE GERTRAUDE.—We cannot name any preparation that will destroy the roots of the hair.

A CONSTANT READER.—An employer is not bound to give a character, but the refusal may all the same be an act of great injustice.

INQUIRY.—We could only consult the directory for the musical composer you mention, and this could be done as easily by you as by us. Consult the Musical Directory.

DISTRESS.—There is no law to compel a landlord to keep a cottage wind and water proof; but there ought to be.

TOMMY.—The Great Western Railway has a mileage of 2,477 miles, and the London and North-Western Railway one of 1,876 miles.

WHITIE.—Certainly, he can be promoted from the ranks to a commission. Such a thing occurs perhaps once a year in the army.

JOE.—If engaged by the year, a year's salary can be demanded. It will be for the employer to fix the holidays.

LADYBIRD.—It is quite impossible for you to cure a scakalia. Only experienced furrers are fit to undertake such a task.

LEWY.—The "IOU" is evidence of the debt if given or acknowledged within six years of the debt being contracted.

F. B.—Bread must now be sold by weight—that is to say, a loaf, whatever the price, must be guaranteed a certain weight.

LEE MIRABLES.—With every desire to assist you it is simply impossible for us to answer without knowing something of the facts of the case.

T. L. O.—The executors are not bound to pay any legacies until they have ascertained the actual yield of the deceased's estate.

MAY BLOSSOM.—In the absence of the husband the wife would be entitled to hold the furniture, etc., left in her possession.

TOM'S DARLING.—1. Second Battalion Border Regiment are at Moultan, Bengal. 2 K Battery of the Horse Artillery are at Lucknow.

EMIGRANT.—You had better write to the secretary, Emigrants' Information Office, Broadway, Westminster, London, S.W., and you will receive an answer.

DICK.—The corn laws were repealed in 1846, Sir Robert Peel being Premier. Peel had been a Conservative, but his party deserted him on this question.

SALLIE.—The Royal Agricultural Society's Show was held at Clifton, Bristol, 1878, and the Bath and West of England Show was held at the same place, 1885.

ART.—1. Probably the director of the National Gallery would give an opinion on the matter. If not, we can suggest nothing but recourse to a reputable picture-dealer. 2. Rubens not unfrequently painted on wood, sometimes on canvas attached to wood, and occasionally in paper attached to canvas.

REGULAR READER.—Sorry we are unable to help you out of your difficulty, but these machines are not made in this country. Our idea is they come from the States.

BALDERSON.—We see no object in taking the date of a Bank of England note, if you have the number correctly together with the letter and small figures preceding the number.

AFFLICTED.—Stammering can be cured by careful attention to the breathing while attempting to speak; and with patience on the part of his parents no child need grow up a stammerer.

ONE IN DIFFICULTIES.—If the debt was incurred in the Isle of Man the debtor would have to answer a summons there. You had better offer what you can afford, and the rest by instalments.

QUITE ENGLISH.—When the Queen dies the Prince of Wales will be crowned King; his Princess, however, will not be crowned, though she will be called Queen by courtesy.

IGNORANT.—1. The year 1900 will not be leap-year. 2. To make the astronomical calculations accurate the extra day has to be dropped once in a hundred years. 3. 1904 will be leap-year.

UNCLE TOM.—Uncle Tom's Cabin is the name of a well-known novel, and there may be for what we know a Life of Uncle Tom, who was the slave referred to in the story, and who died only recently.

FAIR ROSALIND.—What you seem to wish is silvered glass; that is a mirror without the frame. Cannot be had, but there is no reason why you should not buy a cheap mirror and take the frame off.

SELF-RESPECT.

When friends (7) assail to try and put thee down
Or lose deride, and ridicule, and frown;
When envy snatches at thy hard-earned crown,
Or malice robs thee of deserved renown,
Rise above them.

Make sure thine aims and purposes are right,
Then gird thyself with valour for the fight;
Clad in the well-proved mail of honour bright,
The victory shall be thine. In virtue's might
Rise above them.

Seek not to put them down, but be thine aim
With mild forbearance to awaken shame;
Show that they will not bring to wealth or fame
Won at the cost of honour or good name—
Rise above them.

But not disheartened by their envious jests
Measure thyself with them by inward test;
With noble emulation do thy best
By making thyself greater—not them less:
Rise above them.

Hold up thine head and show thy manly face;
Worth, intellect, will, energy, I trace.
These coils well used will purchase name and place
Worth all the phantom honours vain men chase:
Rise above them.

Above them—not in petty influence bought
With gold—by greedy office mongers sought,
But in the dignity of Godlike thought,
By high integrity and culture taught:
Rise above them.

Thy heavenly Father's aid and guidance crave
To keep thee self-contained and firm and brave.
Master of every impulse—not the slave—
By aspirations high thy Make grave:
Rise above them.

M. F. V. D.

JACKO.—There are no such licensed houses anywhere under British law, nor are sales of the kind you describe permitted. Someone has been telling you more than he knew.

DANNY.—A divorced woman has no legal claim to her former husband's name; and if she took a title with her husband's name she would consequently cease to have a claim to such title.

KEL.—We have not heard of the doctor you name; but the town where he is said to reside is quite small, and it amounts to a certainty that the station-master can give him address if you ask him for it.

MARY ANNE.—Fetal servitude "for life" and for "the term of his natural life" mean the same thing. The convict is usually released at the end of twenty years; but not always.

A SUFFERER.—The best preventive of sea-sickness is declared to be anti-pyrene, 14 to 16 grains being taken each day for three days preceding embarkation and three days after sailing, good enough for the whole treatment and divide into six portions.

HARRY.—We have no knowledge of the Canadian force you refer to, and as for the forces in other colonial settlements where they are composed of Europeans they are usually drawn from city forces in Scotland or England.

TRAVELLER.—Where preparations can be made for completely isolating and properly nursing patients at home the authorities are not justified in removing them to a public hospital, if for no other reason than that in doing so they are wasting the public funds at their disposal. Relatives may very well refuse to permit removal in such cases.

PUZZLED.—Bristol is a city and a county in itself, but it is not a "shire." The fifty-two counties of England and Wales are commonly spoken of as the "shires," but strictly speaking a "shire" and a "county" are not interchangeable terms.

ANXIOUS FOR ADVICE.—What you are aiming at is evidently an annuity. Must tell us whether you are man or woman, and your age, before it is possible for us to say what sum you must pay now to obtain £1 weekly some time hence. It will be a large one.

CONSTANCE.—Of course, no human being can tell you when a season begins; the change comes imperceptibly. But taking one year with another, what are called average dates have been arrived at. They are those given in the almanacs and diaries.

IN A FIX.—If the servant was engaged to come on a certain date you were not at liberty to engage another in her place until she has broken her engagement by not coming. As it is, she may claim compensation for your breach of contract.

STELLA.—You are mistaken. The lime has not stained your cloth, it has bleached the colours out of it, and there is no remedy for that except you like to try to wash some aniline colours in. Get any colour of aniline dye at the chemist's.

T. P.—All the children of the deceased are entitled to share equally in the property he has left. If anyone has taken possession of any of the goods without authority, he can be summoned by the representative of the deceased for illegally detaining them.

D. F.—We consider you should pay a proportion of the "board wages" for the broken week. Had you provided the board she would, of course, have lived at your expense during those four days, so you will live nothing by paying.

GEORGE.—A medical preparation may be patented, of any other name, and then each box or bottle must bear a Government stamp according to value. The price selling the preparation must then take out a House of £5 a year.

L. B.—We don't quite know what you mean by the "longest ride by rail" in England, but in point of distance from Exeter to Carlisle, by G.W.B. and L. and N.W. Railway Companies, without changing carriages, would perhaps suit you.

IGNORAMUS.—A physician may be a doctor of medicine (M.D.), but every M.D. is not a physician, that term, as commonly used, implying that the medical man does not seek a general practice, but prefers to be consulted only on special forms of disease.

PAT.—Joseph Brady, Timothy Kelly, Thomas Caffrey, Patrick Delany, Daniel Curley, and Michael Ryan were the men hanged for the murder of Lord F. Cavendish and Mr. Burke in Phoenix Park. Robert Ford and James Carey were approvers. Fitz-Harris (Skin the Goat) imprisoned for life.

BIBBY.—Stammering can only be cured by the exercise of great patience and perseverance, unless there is anything wrong with the formation of your mouth and throat. Practice speaking slowly and distinctly when you are alone, especially going over any word that is a particular stumbling-block. If, when you are talking to others, you come to any difficulty, pause and take breath and try to overcome any nervousness which only aggravates the evil. If you are among people who turn your stammer into ridicule, try not to get irritated, as it only makes the stammering worse. Remember the old adage, "Patience and perseverance, like faith, remove mountains." We trust that your mountain may soon be removed.

HYPATIA.—Hypatia was a beautiful heathenness, who lived in Alexandria, in Egypt, in the early part of the fifth century, and used to lecture in public with great success, upon philosophy and mythology. Cyril was then the Christian bishop or patriarch of Alexandria; and being a man of Roman pluck and earnestness, he regarded Hypatia with enmity, which she repaid with lofty scorn. The Christians at length became so exasperated against the beautiful and eloquent paganess that they broke out into threats against her life; and their hatred was intensified by the fact that Orestes, the Roman prefect, or governor, admired her and took counsel of her in all important matters. Finally, the wild monks of the desert came swarming to Alexandria to exclaim against Hypatia as the high-priestess of Anti-christ, and the excitement ran so high that she was waylaid in the street, dragged to the chief temple of the Christians, and there torn in pieces and her flesh scraped from her bones. Cyril was not a party to this horrible crime, but he refused to give up the perpetrators of it; and such was the anarchy of the times that there was no power in Africa which would compel their surrender.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by G. F. CORNFORD: and Printed by WOODFALL and KIMBER, 79 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.